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Madame Necker

Her Family and her Friends

Frédéric Boissonnas, Geneva.

MADAME NECKER.

From a Portrait by DUPLESSIS at the Château de Coppet.

By courtesy of the Proprietors of 'L'Art et les Artistes.'

MADAME NECKER

Her Family and her Friends

With some Account of her Husband's Three Administrations

BY

MARK GAMBIER-PARRY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO

MY FRIENDS,

P. D. C. E.,

M. A. C. G., &

H. P. M. M-P.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

Among distinguished women of foreign birth who resided in Paris during the later years of the eighteenth century few became better known in literary circles than Madame Necker; and her salon of men of letters, which outlived those of her numerous rivals and remained in existence until the very eve of the Revolution, may rightly be considered the last of the "ancien régime." In view of the long and intimate connection she maintained with most of the principal "littérateurs" of those days, an account of her life would seem incomplete without some reference to the celebrated men who formed what was then called her "bureau d'esprit." I have therefore included in this work a description of the different writers who enjoyed her friendship, and of those who most constantly attended her literary assemblies. From the day of her marriage Madame Necker determined to promote her husband's advancement by every means in her power, and it was largely with that end in view that she invited to her salon people who

possessed some influence in the political world which he aspired to enter. Her hopes in this direction were eventually fulfilled by Necker's nomination to the Treasury in 1776, but the satisfaction she felt at his success was afterwards clouded by anxiety when she became aware of the enormous difficulties with which he was faced and of the libels that were freely circulated concerning him. These libels, in addition to the reverses he met with in the course of his public career, occasioned her the greatest distress of mind, which contributed more than anything else to impair the strength of her delicate constitution and to bring about that rapid decline in her health which resulted in her early death.

Necker's gradual rise from a humble clerkship in a Geneva banking house to the most responsible post in the Government of France was marked by an interesting series of events, the last of which were closely associated with the opening phases of the French Revolution. His three administrations as Controller-General of Finances have often excited curiosity in the past among those who have desired to become familiar with a critical period of French history, and I venture therefore to hope that the subject will once more arouse interest in the same quarter.

With the object of throwing fresh light, if that is still possible, upon the earlier years of a brilliant authoress, I have briefly described the upbringing

and education of Madame de Staël; her relations with her parents; the circumstances connected with her marriage; and her varied interests and occupations up to the time of her mother's death in 1794.

In writing the life of Madame Necker, whose personality can well be numbered among the most interesting of eighteenth-century Paris, I have relied as far as possible upon the testimony of those men and women who were personally acquainted with her, and upon the evidence of French historians whose opinions, formed after long and exhaustive research, are entitled to the highest consideration. Among these last I must especially mention M. le Comte d'Haussonville, author of an admirable work entitled 'Le Salon de Madame Necker,' which has proved of invaluable assistance to me in collecting suitable material for this volume.

M. G-P.

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MADAME NECKER:

HER FAMILY AND HER FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

On rising ground, at the foot of the Juras and at a spot not more than three or four miles distant from Lausanne and the shores of the Lake of Geneva, lies Crassier, a small village, with little to distinguish it from others in the "Pays de Vaud," boasting only the usual cluster of modest dwellings, with church and parsonage standing in their midst. In that parsonage, "a plain, white house with green shutters, divided by a little garden from the road," towards which it faced, there lived in 1737 an impecunious, though much respected, Protestant minister, named Louis Antoine Curchod, and his wife, a lady of French descent. Pasteur Curchod was one of the last representatives of a family which had lived for centuries in the "Vaud country." In years gone by his ancestors had sometimes intermarried with the nobility of the surrounding châteaux, and had

evidently once occupied a position of some importance in the district. Gradual loss of fortune and other vicissitudes had at length reduced the family to humbler circumstances, however, and thus it came about that the parson of Crassier, since his wife had brought him but a meagre dower, had little beyond his stipend to depend upon.

Madame Curchod was, as stated above, of French extraction. She was the daughter of Jean Albert, a lawyer of Montélimart, in Provence, and his wife, whose maiden name was Madeleine Repara. At the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the subsequent persecution of Protestants in France, the Albert family had been compelled to quit their native town and seek refuge abroad. They eventually settled at Lausanne, which, though so near the frontier, was always at that period a safe harbourage for French refugees.

With no small pretensions to beauty Mademoiselle Albert had been greatly admired in Lausanne society as a girl, as much for her personal attractions as for the charm of her delightful disposition. More than one suitor had come forward in those days with offers of wealth and position, but she had preferred a marriage of affection to one of convenience, and had therefore given her hand to the excellent though impoverished M. Curchod.

At the time when our story opens, that is to say at the end of May 1737, she had just given birth to a daughter who received at her baptism the names

Louise Suzanne. Destined to be their only child, she naturally became the supreme object of all her parents' hopes and affections. As soon as she was old enough she entered upon the earlier stages of a thorough, if, indeed, a somewhat strenuous education. Her father, who seems to have possessed intellectual attainments above the ordinary, had devoted much of his leisure to the study of science and history; he therefore undertook to teach his daughter the elements of those subjects which had ever been among the principal interests of his life.

Aided by a retentive memory and great powers of concentration, Suzanne responded with such excellent results to his teaching that at the age of sixteen she had already acquired a fair knowledge of history, some acquaintance with the classics, and more than a smattering of science. Moreover, thanks to her researches in the professorial libraries of Geneva and Lausanne, she had become conversant with philosophy and geometry, and had studied many of the works of the best contemporary writers.

It might well be supposed that so much learning had been acquired at the expense of pleasure and enjoyment, and that in consequence Suzanne Curchod was of a solemn, serious turn of mind, with little of the gaiety and brightness natural to girls of her age. Proofs are not wanting to show, however, that during these years of her girlhood she possessed a plentiful share of vivacity and liveliness,

and that there was nothing of the pedant in her disposition. She had inherited her mother's refined, delicate, and regular cast of features, and in addition to these advantages she had beautiful fair hair, a brilliant complexion, and bright sparkling blue eyes. Her figure, though never graceful, was fine and well-proportioned, and this, coupled with a certain quickness of movement, contrasted curiously with her gentle tone of voice and modest unassuming air. Her character, the dominant qualities of which had been founded upon the strongest religious principles, would have been as attractive as her appearance had not its very perfection a little detracted from the charms of its possessor. As a girl, these qualities were, of course, less marked than in later years, for Suzanne had not yet begun to subject herself to the system of self-examination and self-mortification which afterwards became the unalterable *régime* of her daily life. But even now certain strong characteristics had begun to assert themselves in her nature. An immense capacity for affection, dogged perseverance, and an unswerving determination to do her duty, no matter at what cost to herself, were among the chief of these.

There is no doubt, as Necker asserts in his Preface to her 'Mélanges,' that of all her traits of character it was this last which exerted the greatest influence over her. "She placed," he writes, "all her personal interest in the accomplishment of her duties; everything else was simply play to her; and all the

splendours of the world would not have distracted her mind from, I do not say the slight remorse, but the devouring grief which an instant's indifference to her rigorous scruples would have caused her." Her own views on this subject are thus expressed: "Happy is he who can feel a passion for doing his duty; for this passion is the only one which embraces and beautifies everything, and which, by putting man continually in God's presence, enables him to live in heaven without leaving earth."

But in quoting these words, which were written years after Suzanne had left her home at Crassier, we are anticipating a later period of her life, when the cares and responsibilities of a great position had devolved upon her. At the age of sixteen she was probably still too young to have formed such mature reflections, or to have adopted that rigid rule of conduct which was one day to be so mercilessly criticised by her Parisian acquaintances.

At present she was just an unusually attractive and accomplished girl, whose lively, good-tempered, and unselfish disposition had gained her the approbation, if not the affection, of all who knew her. Her numerous charms, as was only to be expected, had already begun to make more than a passing impression upon members of the opposite sex. From time to time certain young pasteurs belonging to Lausanne would find their way to the

parsonage of Crassier, ostensibly with the object of assisting M. Curchod in the fulfilment of his sacred duties, in reality with that of paying court to his fair daughter. Since these young men were accustomed to arrive on Sunday mornings, spend the night at the Presbytère, and return to Lausanne or Geneva the following day, it will readily be understood that opportunities were not wanting for accomplishing their purpose.[1]

That Suzanne received the attentions of her admirers with complaisance seems evident from the criticisms that her behaviour sometimes called forth from one or other of her well-meaning though over-anxious friends. We do not hear, however, that her parents disapproved of, even if they suspected, these innocent flirtations, which, as far as Suzanne herself was concerned, were no sooner past than forgotten.

Among the greatest pleasures of these early years of her life were the visits she paid every spring and summer to some relations who resided at Lausanne. Since it was there that she first became a prominent member of society, it will not be unsuitable at this juncture to introduce our readers to the social life of the town as it existed at that period of the eighteenth century. Lausanne had then recently become a centre of literary interest owing to the presence of Voltaire, who had arrived there from France in December 1754, and had subsequently

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

acquired two residences in the district, namely, "Les Délices," near Geneva, and "Monrion," on the road between Lausanne and Ouchy. Soon after his arrival the great man had begun to amuse himself by arranging amateur theatrical performances in which ladies and gentlemen from the surrounding neighbourhood, trained by himself, were only too proud to take part.[1] Later he went to live for a time at "Chêne," a house situated in Lausanne itself and close to "Mon Repos," the abode of the Marquis and Marquise de Genlis, who were two of the most enthusiastic members of the dramatic society he had formed. In a barn, near their house, M. and Madame de Genlis improvised a miniature stage and auditorium, and placed them at Voltaire's disposition.[2] For the brilliant little performances that afterwards took place there, "dresses and scenes," says Gibbon, "were provided at the expense of the actors; and the author directed the rehearsals with the zeal and attention of paternal love."[3] Excellent renderings were given of such plays as "Zaïre," "Alzire," "L'Enfant Prodigue," and "Zulime," in which Voltaire himself "represented the characters best adapted to his years—Lusignan, Alvarez, Benassar, and Euphemon." True to the traditions of his youth, he played them in the grand manner of a bygone age, and "his declamation being

[1] Tallentyre's 'Life of Voltaire.'
[2] Ibid.
[3] Gibbon's 'Miscellaneous Works.'

fashioned to the pomp and cadence of the old stage, expressed the enthusiasm of poetry rather than the feelings of nature."[1]

Invitations to these performances were naturally much prized by the residents of Lausanne, who flocked in large numbers to witness the unusual spectacle "of a great poet declaiming his own productions," and they were often moved to tears by the extraordinary realism evinced by the actors.

It was, then, in this society, "refined in a visible degree by the wit and philosophy of Voltaire, his table and theatre," that Suzanne Curchod made her *début*. Or, to be more precise, in one section of it. For, strange as it may seem in a city with only 9000 inhabitants, there were in those days two distinct "coteries" in Lausanne society. One, which represented the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, resided in large houses with gardens overlooking the lake in the "Bourg" quarter; while the others, mainly composed of professors, their families, and the students belonging to the ancient Academy, occupied the "Cité," the older portion of the town, in which is also situated the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame and the Bishop's Palace.[2]

The former, to most of whom the surrounding châteaux belonged, had preferred, since their feudal rights had been abolished, to exchange the dull monotony of the country for the variety afforded

[1] Gibbon's 'Miscellaneous Works.'

[2] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

by the social distractions of the town. Though separated both by birth and tradition from their less aristocratic, though probably more cultured, neighbours of the "Cité," they did not disdain to take part in the assemblies, "piqueniques," or other entertainments which the bourgeois provided.[1]

Suzanne Curchod, who soon became prominent among the more youthful members of the community, belonged to a certain association which, from the age of its members, was called the "Société du Printemps."

"It consisted," says Gibbon, "of fifteen or twenty young unmarried ladies of genteel, though not of the very first, families; the eldest perhaps about twenty, all agreeable, several handsome, and two or three of exquisite beauty. At each other's houses they assembled almost every day, without the controul, or even the presence, of a mother or an aunt; they were trusted to their own prudence, among a crowd of young men of every nation in Europe. They laughed, they sang, they danced, they played at cards, they acted comedies; but in the midst of this careless gaiety they respected themselves, and were respected by the men; the invisible line between liberty and licentiousness was never transgressed by a gesture, a word, or a look, and their virgin chastity was never sullied by the 'breath of scandal or suspicion.'"

The beauty and accomplishments of "la belle

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

Curchod," as she soon became known, excited a good deal of admiration not only among the young swains who attended the *réunions* of this association, but even among the worthy professors of the Academy. The latter, on nearer acquaintance, were also not a little surprised to find a girl of her age so well informed about a variety of learned subjects with which young ladies did not usually concern themselves.

The attentions Suzanne received on all sides were sometimes apt, it seems, to become a little wearisome to her. For when, in the course of a long evening, she had patiently listened for hours to the compliments of her many admirers, her face would gradually assume a detached expression as though she were only awaiting a favourable opportunity to divert the conversation into more interesting channels. But to imply that she placed no value at all upon the favourable impression she had made would give an entirely false idea of her at this period of her life. She could not help feeling flattered by the tributes of admiration she received from her youthful adorers, whose praises, as she candidly admitted to one of her friends, "pleased her more than any other." [1]

In later years she was often wont to deplore the careless frivolity of which she thought she had at this time been guilty. There is nothing to prove, however, that she had ever the smallest reason to

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

feel ashamed of her behaviour; and if she had enjoyed her youth to the full, it was at least fortunate that it was within her power to do so, considering the troubles and anxieties which were afterwards in store for her.

It was in the course of one of her visits to Lausanne that the students of the Academy, acting under her directions, founded a literary society, to which they gave the high-sounding title of the "Académie des Eaux de la Poudrière." "La Poudrière" was the name of a stream which flowed through a neighbouring valley in which the members of this newly formed Academy decided to hold their meetings. Suzanne herself was elected President, with poetic name "Thémire," while her associates adopted others, such as "Céladon," "Nizance," or "Sylvandre."[1] Rules and statutes were drawn up, to which every one was expected to conform, and before a new member could be enrolled he was asked to supply his future colleagues with an accurate description of himself, his character, and his qualifications. When this had been read and his merits weighed, votes for his election were taken. If, after these formalities, he was fortunate enough to be admitted, his only serious obligation for the future was to contribute from time to time an essay or a poem to be read at one of the meetings of the Academy.[2]

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'
[2] Ibid.

Suzanne conscientiously fulfilled her share of this duty, and frequently composed some small work in prose or verse, dealing with subjects most likely to interest her audience. This task was one that afforded her no small degree of pleasure, since it enabled her to gratify the literary aspirations to which her successful studies had given birth.

Besides these contributions, individually supplied by each member, debates upon a variety of social questions, including even one so modern as the rights of women, and topics of personal interest such as friendship and love, were freely discussed in the valley of the "Poudrière."

It was at this time, when she was in her twentieth year, that Suzanne Curchod first made the acquaintance, probably at one of the *réunions* of the "Société du Printemps," which he sometimes frequented, of a certain young Englishman who was destined to play a highly romantic part in her life. This, as we need scarcely inform our readers, was Edward Gibbon.

Since his arrival at Lausanne, about four years before, Gibbon had been living at the house of M. Pavilliard, a Protestant divine. This worthy man had been directed by Gibbon's father to use all his powers of reasoning and persuasion to induce his charge to renounce the Roman Catholic religion, which he had embraced while an undergraduate at Oxford. Gibbon's own account of the melancholy situation in which he then found himself enables us

LAUSANNE IN THE EIGHTEENTH C

to form some idea of the sort of life he was leading in 1753.

"I had now exchanged," he writes, "my elegant apartment in Magdalen College for a narrow gloomy street, the most unfrequented of an unhandsome town, for an old inconvenient house, and for a small chamber ill-contrived and ill-furnished, which, on the approach of winter, instead of a companionable fire, must be warmed by the dull, invisible heat of a stove. From a man I was again degraded to the dependence of a schoolboy. . . . My condition seemed as destitute of hope as it was devoid of pleasure: I was separated for an indefinite, which appeared an infinite, term from my native country; and I had lost all connection with my Catholic friends."

This disagreeable state of things continued, however, only until the time when, convinced of his religious errors, he consented to be received back into the Church he had forsaken.

After nearly nineteen months of perpetual discussions, during which he had employed the strongest and most irrefutable arguments in support of the doctrine of the Reformed faith, M. Pavilliard at last achieved his object in the summer of 1754. On Christmas Day of that year Gibbon received the Sacrament in the church of Lausanne. There was now, of course, no further reason to subject him any longer to the life of seclusion which he had found so irksome. M. Pavilliard,

therefore, restored him his liberty, and introduced him to a few of the best families of the town. In a short time he became a familiar figure at every social entertainment, and was often invited to witness the theatricals at "Mon Repos," where, after the performances, he used "sometimes to sup with the actors." In a far happier frame of mind than a few months earlier, he was now able to record in his Journal that "he was familiar in some and acquainted in many houses"; and that "his evenings were generally devoted to cards and conversation, either in private parties or numerous assemblies." His introduction to Lausanne society soon brought him in contact with the members of the "Société du Printemps," whose gay and lively *réunions* he occasionally attended. There seems good reason to believe, as has been mentioned above, that it was at one of these that he first made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Curchod.

Suzanne's first impressions of her future lover seem to show that even at their first meeting she felt attracted by this young Englishman, who so greatly differed from any one she had ever met before. She saw in him a short, thick-set young man, whose features were redeemed from excessive plainness by an air of distinction which stamped him at once as a person of birth and breeding. She also particularly noted and admired his manner of easy politeness when addressing his women acquaintances—an attitude, she was quick to ob-

serve, that never developed into familiarity. Most of all, however, was she struck by the extremely intelligent and ever-changing expression of his face, which, for all its ugliness, was not wanting in character and interest.

Gibbon himself, meanwhile, having heard her praises in every mouth for some little time before he met her, now realised that the reports he had received of her had been by no means exaggerated. "The wit, the beauty, and erudition of Mademoiselle Curchod," he says, "were the theme of universal applause. The report of such a prodigy awakened my curiosity; I saw and loved. I found her learned without pedantry, lively in conversation, pure in sentiment, and elegant in manners; and the first sudden emotion was fortified by the habits and knowledge of a more familiar acquaintance."[1] When, at the beginning of the summer, Suzanne returned to Crassier, her parents invited Gibbon to visit them. He appears to have done so for the first time in June, the event being afterwards significantly mentioned in his Journal with the familiar quotation: "Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori." This visit was speedily followed by others. Gibbon would sometimes drive out from Lausanne and spend the day at Crassier, or would remain there a night or two, but whatever the duration of his stay he always made a point of spending as much time as possible in

[1] Gibbon's 'Miscellaneous Works,' vol. i.

Suzanne's society, patiently but resolutely pressing his suit.

During the earlier days of their acquaintance, that is to say, at the parties and assemblies at which they had met at Lausanne, she appears to have felt nothing more than a friendly interest in him; at Crassier, however, where she was no longer surrounded by a crowd of admirers, her attitude towards him quickly underwent a change. "In a calm retirement," explains her lover, "the gay vanity of youth no longer fluttered in her bosom; she listened to the voice of truth and passion, and I might presume to hope that I had made some impression on a virtuous heart."

In the meantime, M. and Mme. Curchod, favourably impressed by his character, bearing, and desirable prospects, "honourably encouraged" his connection with their daughter.

In the intervals of days or weeks that elapsed between their meetings the young couple had now begun to exchange letters, which were expressed, on Gibbon's side at least, with all the ardour of first love. Suzanne's replies to these have not been preserved, but from the incidents that follow there seems to be no doubt that she had begun to reciprocate her lover's affection for her.

Before the end of November, doubtless during a visit of several days that Gibbon paid to the parsonage in that month, a secret, yet none the less

binding, engagement took place between them, which, though not publicly announced, was fully accepted and approved of by M. and Madame Curchod. A month or six weeks later Gibbon, accompanied by a few friends, went to Friburg to attend the "fête des rois." From thence he afterwards made a short tour through the neighbouring districts, and did not return to Lausanne until the beginning of February.

But meanwhile, even before he had set out on this tour, and thus only a short time after their engagement had taken place, Suzanne had already begun to suspect the sincerity of his attachment. For she had noticed a want of spontaneity in the tone of his last letters that had caused her serious misgiving, and although they contained no lack of fine phrases, they were expressed, she thought, in a laboured, artificial sort of style that seemed to show that the writer had been inspired by no genuine warmth of feeling whatever. In her opinion every sentence was simply the outcome of calm reasoning, and bore no resemblance to the sentiments usually felt by an ardent lover.

Moreover, the fact that Gibbon had allowed a letter she had written him to remain several weeks unanswered, afforded her yet further proof that her suspicions were justified, though in reality this omission was only due to his absence from Lausanne at the time. But rather than condemn him un-

heard, she decided to state her doubts quite clearly in a second letter which Gibbon received a day or two after his return home.

Since he had hitherto believed himself to be genuinely and deeply in love with the parson's daughter, it was naturally a matter of no small surprise to him to find the sincerity of his affection suddenly called in question and himself considered the most inconstant of men. In an answer he hastened to send her a few hours later he endeavoured to set her mind at rest by reminding her of the numberless proofs he had given her of his unalterable devotion, and asserted that if he had not expressed his feelings in a continuous outburst of effusive language it was not because his love was waning. Had he done so, he assured her, it would have amounted simply to affectation, since it was not in his nature to describe what he felt in such terms as those.

After seeking to remove her doubts by these assurances, he went on to inform her that he had found on his return a letter from his father granting him at last permission to return to England as soon as he pleased.

Now this letter was so affectionately worded, and contained so many hopes and plans for his future, that Gibbon began for the first time to fear lest his projected marriage with a penniless foreigner might not meet with the paternal approval. Such a contingency seemed the more probable when he remem-

bered a certain promise he had made Suzanne at the time of their engagement, to the effect that after their marriage he would continue to live in the neighbourhood of Crassier, so that she might remain within easy reach of her parents. This arrangement seemed now, in face of his father's ambitions, difficult, if not impossible, to carry out.

He frankly confessed these fears in his next letter to Suzanne, but took care to add that since his father seemed sincerely anxious to do everything to promote his happiness, he could not but hope that he would not place obstacles in the way of their marriage. Suzanne's reply shows that she was actuated in this matter by the most generous and disinterested motives. The immense importance she always attached to filial obedience, and the conviction that, placed as he now was, she would have shrunk from thwarting the wishes of her own father, prompted her now to restore Gibbon his liberty. Never, she informed him, would she agree to marry him against his parent's consent or even were that reluctantly accorded; for by so doing she would afterwards hold herself to blame for bringing grief and disappointment into the declining years of his father's life. Yet in leaving her lover thus free to act as he felt was most consistent with his duty, she by no means intended that in the event of the elder Gibbon refusing to give his sanction to the match the ties that bound her to his son should in consequence be entirely severed. She

naturally expected that the latter would await a more favourable opportunity to bring about their marriage, and since his father was now a man of advanced age it did not seem to her, according to all reasonable calculations, that that moment could be indefinitely delayed. But in this, as we shall see, she was placing too much reliance upon an affection that was not proof against determined and inflexible opposition.

Gibbon left Lausanne to return to England on the eleventh of April 1758, after an absence abroad of "four years, ten months, and fifteen days."

When he arrived home he very soon discovered that his father would never consent to his marriage with a foreign lady, no matter what her individual merits might be. Fearful of the consequences of the paternal displeasure, he therefore decided, after what seems to us the briefest possible hesitation, to relinquish absolutely and finally his claims to the hand of Mademoiselle Curchod. "Without his [Mr Gibbon's] consent," he asserts, "I was myself destitute and helpless. After a painful struggle I yielded to my fate: I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son; my wound was insensibly healed by time, absence, and the habits of a new life. My cure was accelerated by a faithful report of the tranquillity and cheerfulness of the lady herself, and my love subsided in friendship and esteem."

With these few words, which entirely fail, of course, to justify or explain his conduct, if he had

ever really loved her, does Gibbon dismiss from his mind the remembrance of his engagement to Suzanne. It is difficult to believe, as he would have us, that there could ever have been much depth of feeling in his affection if, on encountering the first obstacle in the shape of his father's opposition, and later, on undergoing the test of "time and absence," it could thus so speedily subside and be forgotten.

If he ever felt any qualms of conscience for what he had done, he soon consoled himself with the reports that afterwards reached him to the effect that Mademoiselle Curchod had accepted her fate with "tranquillity and cheerfulness." There was, in point of fact, however, no truth in this account of her condition of mind. Far from accepting her lover's inconstancy in a spirit of patient resignation, she continued to live for the next four years in a state of wretched uncertainty with regard to his intentions, of which, during most of that time, he kept her entirely ignorant.

CHAPTER II.

MANY months passed by after Gibbon's departure before Suzanne received any news of him. For although he had written to her three times in the course of his journey homewards, owing to some miscarriage not one of his letters had reached their destination. At first, remembering that she had given him entire liberty to act as he felt best, she did not attribute his silence to forgetfulness or infidelity. Indeed, so certain did she feel that he eventually intended to marry her that, in compliance with her father's wishes, she even allowed another suitor, for whom she felt no sort of regard, to pay court to her, though only, of course, permitting him to do so upon the understanding that as soon as Gibbon returned to claim her he should immediately relinquish his suit. This new aspirant to her hand was a M. de Montplaisir, a man of good birth but modest fortune, who had so successfully gained the good opinion of M. Curchod that that excellent man had come to regard him as a more suitable match for his daughter than her English lover. For although M. Curchod had certainly approved of

Suzanne's engagement to Gibbon, he had felt at the same time some doubt as to the suitability of a union in which she would be entirely dependent upon her husband's bounty for everything she possessed in the world. Doubtless foreseeing that Gibbon's father would oppose his marriage for the same reason, and the young man's silence seeming to confirm this opinion, he had given his support to the advances of M. de Montplaisir, feeling that this gentleman's moderate income would place his daughter under a very much smaller obligation than if she had married a man of Gibbon's prospects. This curious situation continued until the latter part of 1759, when Suzanne heard at last from Gibbon that his father had refused his consent to their marriage. There was nothing in the letter containing this announcement to show that in consequence of this refusal Gibbon either intended or desired to give up all further claims to her hand. Nevertheless the news, though not unexpected, was so great a shock to Suzanne that she became dangerously ill, and for some time afterwards her condition caused her parents the greatest anxiety. When at length she began to get better she went for a change of air to Lausanne, and there throughout her convalescence received visits from numerous admirers, whose attentions appear to have been not unwelcome to her. Meanwhile she continued to keep up her connection with M. de Montplaisir by means of a correct and punctual

correspondence. She was now no longer obliged to do so, since after her father had seen at the time of her illness how entirely she had given her heart to Gibbon he had quite ceased to influence her feelings. This highly unsatisfactory state of affairs came to a final ending a few months later when, on the death of M. Curchod, all further intercourse with M. de Montplaisir became unnecessary.

In January 1760 M. Curchod died suddenly, leaving his wife and daughter practically penniless, and for the time being homeless as well. For with his death both his parsonage and stipend passed into other hands, namely, those of his successor, the new incumbent of Crassier.

Suzanne and her mother now retired to a small house in Geneva, where for a little while they attempted to live upon the meagre pension which was granted to Madame Curchod by the authorities at Berne. After a short time, however, it became evident that their slender income was insufficient to keep them both, and that some means must be found to augment their resources. Suzanne decided that the only way to do so was for her to turn to account the excellent education she had received by offering her services as governess to the children of her acquaintances. For such a career she was fortunate enough to possess in her intellectual acquirements the best possible qualifications, besides a sufficient knowledge of music to enable her to teach both harp and violin correctly. But it was

with a heavy heart that she embarked upon an enterprise which, though her clients did all in their power to spare her humiliation, put to an extremely hard test both her temper and her pride. When, as she often did, she recalled to mind her former triumphs as the acknowledged beauty of Lausanne society, she can well be pardoned for taking very much to heart her altered position. Yet the irritability and depression with which at times she now reproached herself were not solely attributable to this; much of her despondency was also due to the uneasiness which Gibbon's conduct continued to cause her. During the last two years she had received nothing more from him than a copy of his 'Essai sur l'étude de la littérature,' which had contained a dedicatory notice to herself, expressed with such apparent coldness as to be in itself a sufficient proof of the writer's altered sentiments. But it was not until the summer of 1762—that is to say, four years after he had left Lausanne—that Gibbon at last wrote to tell her that filial duty compelled him to renounce her for ever. He stated that he had reluctantly arrived at this decision after witnessing the bitter disappointment which the announcement of his intended marriage caused his father, especially when the latter realised that this would entail his son's residence in a foreign country and an almost complete separation between them. Gibbon felt no scruples in explaining to Suzanne that he had made up his mind after

"*two hours*'" meditation in his room, and this statement seems to give to the expressions of despair with which the letter concludes an air of insincerity which it is astonishing that she did not herself perceive. Gibbon undoubtedly meant, by the way in which he had expressed himself, that she should no longer count upon their marriage. Strange though it may seem, however, she did not put such a construction upon his words. She now believed that he had only broken off their engagement because he felt that he had no right to expect her to wait on indefinitely for the moment when he should be free to wed her, and because he knew that she had received other advantageous proposals which, but for her understanding with him, she might have felt inclined to accept. Thus, under the mistaken impression that he was sacrificing his own happiness to hers, she still refused to see that he no longer loved her. She therefore determined to wait patiently until a solution could be found for existing difficulties, being encouraged by the thought that since these were principally due to Mr Gibbon's opposition they could not last for ever. But, meanwhile, a new and far greater affliction was in store for her. Barely six months after she had received Gibbon's letter of renunciation Madame Curchod fell ill, and almost before her daughter had had time to realise the gravity of her condition she had already passed away. So intense and overwhelming was Suzanne's grief at the loss of

one to whom she had all her life been passionately devoted, that for many weeks after her mother's death she remained plunged in a sort of stupor from which nothing would rouse her, and which soon began to undermine her health. It was at this time, indeed, that she began to show the first symptoms of that nervous disorder from which she was to suffer intermittently for the rest of her life. Both now and in after years this painful malady often caused her acute suffering, deprived her of sleep, and reduced her to a state of nervous agitation from which she was only able to obtain relief by remaining for hours in a standing posture or by reclining in a warm bath.[1]

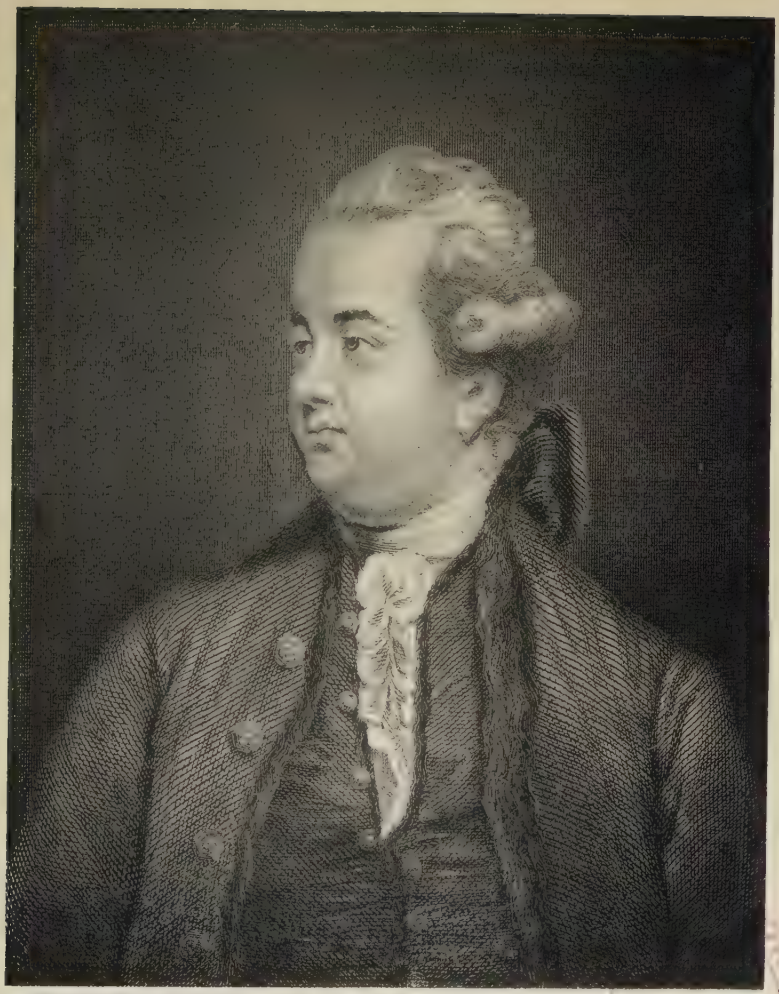
After her mother's death she found herself reduced to the last extreme of poverty, for the pension which had been accorded to Madame Curchod, as the widow of a pasteur, was no longer forthcoming. Suzanne was now almost entirely dependent upon her earnings, and had it not been for the employment her friends were glad to give her, she would probably have found herself in extremely straitened circumstances.

At this crisis in her life she was fortunate enough to be able to rely upon the friendship of a man to whom she had long been bound by the strongest ties of affection and esteem. He was a young Protestant minister of French extraction, by name Moultou, who had married one of the daughters of

[1] Introduction to the 'Mélanges de Madame Necker.'

M. Cayla, a merchant of Geneva, and an old friend of M. Curchod. From the nature of his devotion to her, it seems probable that he had once hoped to make Suzanne his wife, but she, realising that his passionate, highly strung, and over-imaginative temperament would make him an exacting husband, had preferred his friendship to his love. After his marriage to Mademoiselle Cayla his attachment to her remained unchanged, so that it was in him that she was always wont to confide in moments of doubt and perplexity. In the spring of 1763, when she was passing once more through a period of great anxiety, she resolved to accept his good offices in order to find a *dénoûment* to a wellnigh intolerable situation.

In May of that year Gibbon returned to Lausanne for the second time. His motive in doing so was not in order to renew his relations with Mademoiselle Curchod, but to revisit the scenes of his youth and to spend some weeks in the society of his old acquaintances. If he had ever felt any compunction lest his return might give rise to renewed hopes in Suzanne's mind, this had been entirely removed by the reports upon her behaviour that had reached him previous to his departure from England. He had heard, from what he considered a reliable source, that "she shared in the social amusements of Lausanne, was surrounded by admirers and listened to them with complaisance." Now this news, even though he had then definitely



EDWARD GIBBON.

From a Portrait by Sir JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

made up his mind not to marry her, caused him considerable annoyance. Chafing at her seeming indifference, he had commented upon it in his diary in no measured terms. "Her amusements," he wrote, "convict her of the most odious dissimulation, and if infidelity is sometimes a weakness, duplicity is always a vice. This episode, curious throughout, has been of use to me; it has opened my eyes to the character of women, and will serve me long as a preservative against the seductions of love." [1]

Unfortunately there were certain points in the gossip to which he had listened which were not entirely without foundation in fact. It was true, of course, that from time to time Suzanne "had shared in the social amusements of Lausanne," and that while there she had been "surrounded by admirers." Gibbon was unaware, however, that these very occasional and all too brief visits represented her one and only relaxation from the tedium of hard and uncongenial work; and that although she had been courted whenever she made her appearance at the balls and assemblies of her friends, she had never given any one of her admirers reason to suppose that she found his attentions more welcome to her than those of his rivals. Perhaps, had he known these facts, they might have done much to modify his displeasure at what he terms her "duplicity," and consequently

[1] Gibbon's 'Miscellaneous Works.'

have made his subsequent behaviour to her less heartless and cruel. So entirely did he believe his connection with her at an end, however, that on arriving at the house of M. and Madame de Mézery at Lausanne he did not consider it necessary to inform her of his return or to arrange a meeting with her. In the meantime Suzanne, who had learned from friends of his arrival, was waiting in a fever of suspense to receive some sign from him. As days passed by, and she heard nothing, her anxiety became so great that she determined at last to write and implore him to put an end to her uncertainty by openly explaining his intentions. To write such a letter was in itself a humiliation to her pride which she remembered all the rest of her life, but rendered desperate at last by the torturing doubts of the past five years, she decided that by this means alone could they finally be dispelled and her mind restored to some degree of tranquillity. We do not know what was Gibbon's answer to this appeal, but whatever it may have been, it appears to have effectually convinced Suzanne that his old affection for her no longer existed. Yet even now she did not quite abandon hope. If once he could be prevailed upon to resume friendly relations with her it was possible, she thought, that a change might take place in his feelings. Desiring to attain that end as soon as possible, she now decided to accept the assistance of Moultou, who had offered to use his influence with a certain great

littérateur to bring pressure to bear on Gibbon, and to convince him that in abandoning Mademoiselle Curchod he had committed an act of grave injustice. This intended intermediary was none other than Jean Jacques Rousseau, with whom young Moultou had ever been an especial favourite, both on account of his scholastic talents and his gentle, sympathetic disposition. Moultou had recently heard from Rousseau, who was then residing at the little village of Môtiers-Travers, that he was shortly expecting a visit from some English travellers, and that it was possible that Gibbon would be of the party. In anticipation of this visit Moultou had already given Rousseau a full account of Suzanne's unfortunate love affair, and later, with her consent, had written to beg him to intercede with Gibbon on her behalf. Rousseau, feeling himself utterly unfitted for such a delicate task, consented to undertake it with considerable reluctance. Contrary to expectation, however, Gibbon never went to Môtiers, so that Moultou's well-intentioned schemes fell through.

As a result of what he had heard from the latter of Gibbon's conduct to Mademoiselle Curchod, Rousseau had formed a very poor opinion of that author's character, as is seen by the following remarks in a letter he wrote to Moultou at the time. "M. Gibbon," he observes, "is not the man for me: I cannot believe that he can be Mademoiselle Curchod's either. He who does not realise

her value is not worthy of her; but he who has realised it and has then renounced her is a man to be despised. She does not know what she wants, and this man treats her better than her own heart. I would a hundred times rather that he left her free and poor with you, than that he carried her away to be rich and miserable in England." [1]

While Moultou had been enlisting Rousseau's support in favour of Suzanne, it appears that Gibbon had heard, probably from the same source which had kept him so constantly informed of her movements, that she was still hoping for a return of his affection. He therefore wrote again at the end of June to remind her that she must henceforward count on nothing more than his friendship and esteem, and pointed out that further correspondence, which he felt might compromise them both in the eyes of the world, ought to be discontinued between them. To this letter, putting an end to the last hopes she had cherished, Suzanne at first disdained to send an answer. But chancing one evening to meet Gibbon at Ferney, whither they had both been invited by Voltaire to witness a theatrical performance, he treated her with so much coldness and disdain that she could no longer hold her peace. On this occasion his attitude showed only too plainly that he considered her greatly to blame for persisting in maintaining with himself an intimacy which, since their engagement

[1] Œuvres de Rousseau: Correspondance, vol. xviii. p. 256.

was now definitely broken off, was neither seemly nor becoming. Further, he had even gone so far as to imply, in a way that could not be misunderstood, that, in acting thus before the eyes of their acquaintances, she was showing a lamentable want of modesty and self-respect. Such an implication as this was, of course, intolerable to a girl of Suzanne's sensitive disposition, and she therefore felt compelled to defend herself by sending Gibbon a detailed explanation of her conduct. This reached him towards the end of September in a letter which contained not only a complete record of events in her life since the period of their engagement in 1757, but at the same time opened his eyes to a point of view of her own conduct which must have been entirely new to him. Retracing, step by step, the various incidents of their love-affair, she now proved to him that, far from ever having been guilty of inconstancy during the last five years, she had sacrificed everything to her mistaken confidence in the sincerity of his affection. It was this which had induced her to reject both the offers of M. de Montplaisir and those of many other gentlemen who had been only too ready to marry her even when, after M. Curchod's death, she had been reduced almost to penury; and it was again this faith in the honesty of his intentions which had made it possible for her to take up her present occupation, the monotony of which would have otherwise been insupportable. More than once,

in the course of her self-justification, Suzanne is unable to refrain from expressing something of the bitter indignation she felt at the heartlessness with which Gibbon had left her to her fate, at a moment when circumstances had conspired to render her situation forlorn and desperate. Notwithstanding this natural resentment, however, she concluded her letter by assuring him that she cannot feel sufficiently thankful to have discovered that he no longer loved her before their marriage had actually taken place, rather than afterwards when, on finding herself an obstacle to the accomplishment of his ambitions, her happiness would have been entirely ruined.

When writing this letter Suzanne doubtless thought that she was finally putting an end to her connection with Gibbon, whom she never expected or desired to see again. A few years later, however, when the softening hand of time had enabled her to modify her views of his conduct, she was to receive him at her house in Paris on a footing of warm friendship.

Towards the end of this year, which was probably the most miserable of her life, she became acquainted with certain members of the French colony in Geneva, one of whom was destined to play a prominent part in her future. At that period of the eighteenth century Geneva had become a fashionable health-resort, and was frequented by many distinguished men and women

who came to consult the celebrated Dr Tronchin,[1] who resided there. Among the principal visitors in 1763 was Marie Louise de la Rochefoucauld, Duchesse d'Enville,[2] a woman celebrated for her charity and kindliness of heart, and one to whom no one worthy of help or interest ever appealed in vain. Her object in coming to Geneva at this time had been as much for the benefit of her own health as in order to superintend her daughters' vaccination — a method of inoculation which Tronchin, who had only recently begun to practise it, had himself done much to popularise.[3]

Madame d'Enville was accustomed to receive at her house most of the chief residents of Geneva, and especially those whose wit, learning, and accomplishments entitled them to consideration. It was doubtless from one of them, or perhaps from Moultou, who sometimes came to see her, that she first heard particulars regarding Mademoiselle Curchod, and the state of extreme poverty to which circumstances had reduced her. She at once determined to do all in her power to assist and befriend her, and with that object engaged Suzanne to give conversational lessons to her

[1] Theodore Tronchin ; b. 1709, d. 1781. After practising for twenty years at Amsterdam, and for eleven years in his native city, he went to Paris in 1766 as physician to the Duc d'Orléans, and there acquired immense popularity as a "médecin à la mode."

[2] Marie Louise de la Rochefoucauld, Duchesse d'Enville ; b. 1716, d. 1796. She was the wife of Louis Frédéric, Duc d'Enville, Lieutenant-General of the King's Naval Forces.

[3] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

daughters, or rather to instruct them in the art of repartee, then so essential a qualification for all who desired to shine in fashionable French society. At the same time she began to make representations to certain high officials in Paris in order to try and effect the restitution of Cardenaux, a property that had once belonged to the Albert family,[1] hoping by this means to be able to augment the slender resources of her protégée. Although Madame d'Enville appears to have been unsuccessful in her efforts in this direction, the fact that she should have undertaken such a task for the sake of one who had no claims upon her benevolence sufficiently indicates that Suzanne possessed in this excellent woman a friend who was influenced by the most unselfish and disinterested motives. After Suzanne's marriage, when wealth and position had made her independent of all further assistance, the Duchess still continued to manifest the same friendly interest in her affairs during many years of subsequent intercourse in Paris. Contemporary with Madame d'Enville's visit to Geneva was that of another Parisian lady of distinction, named Germaine l'Arrivée, Marquise de Vermenoux, who had taken up her residence in the Moultous' house in the Bourg de Four. The daughter of a rich Genevese bourgeois, Madame de Vermenoux had married, a

[1] Suzanne had a right to this property through her mother, who had been a member of the Albert family.

few years before, a French nobleman of that name, who is said to have treated her none too kindly. His death, not long after their marriage, had consequently caused her but little regret. At this time not more than six-and-twenty years of age, she had, says Marmontel,[1] "the stately and majestic air usually attributed to the goddess Minerva, but in spite of her imposing appearance, possessed something extremely attractive in the expression of her face," which was not belied by the charm of her delightful disposition. Constantly the prey to some real or fancied ailment, she was for ever trying to distract her mind from the thought of her physical infirmities by surrounding herself with clever and entertaining company, which included, during her visit to Geneva, the Moultous and their friends. And thus it came about that Suzanne, who often accepted Moultou's hospitality in return for the instruction she gave his children, was brought in touch with Madame de Vermenoux soon after that lady's arrival. From the first moment she set eyes on her, the Marquise appears to have felt irresistibly drawn towards this beautiful girl, whose intellectual gifts seemed so out of proportion to the penurious existence she was compelled to lead. This favourable impression became greater as their acquaintance developed, and at the end of a few weeks Madame de Vermenoux became so much attached to Suzanne that she proposed

[1] Mémoires de Marmontel.

that she should accompany her back to Paris, in the capacity of "dame de compagnie," when her cure at Geneva was ended. This proposal could scarcely have been made at a more opportune moment. For months past, indeed ever since her engagement to Gibbon had been finally broken off, Suzanne had desired to give up her present uncongenial occupation as soon as she could obtain some post in surroundings that would not recall to her mind at every turn the unhappy incidents of the last three years. She had also, on more than one occasion, been on the point of giving her hand to another suitor, by name Corrévon, a lawyer of Yverdon, whom she had met while on a visit to Neuchâtel, and who had lately most earnestly pressed her to accept him. But the prospect of residing in a small and quiet town, possessing scarcely any social advantages whatever, had caused her so much dismay that she had made it a condition of acceptance that she should not be obliged to remain there for more than three months in the year. This arrangement being scarcely conducive to the happiness of the unfortunate Corrévon, whose business naturally compelled him to live at Yverdon almost the whole year round, no decision had yet been arrived at, although Suzanne's friends had done their best to urge her to marry him.[1]

Again, from time to time she had been making

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

inquiries concerning the situations of governesses or companions in English or German families, believing, as a last resort, that even these would be preferable to her present mode of life. Madame de Vermenoux' offer, therefore, seemed at first to fulfil all her requirements. After careful reflection, however, she could not help feeling that the obligations under which it would place her towards the Marquise would eventually outweigh its advantages. Moultou, to whom she confided her scruples, fortunately considered the matter from quite a different standpoint. Pointing out to her the exceptional opportunities she would have in the gay world of Paris of making new friends, and of enjoying the innumerable attractions to be found there, he at length persuaded her to accept the proposal.

CHAPTER III.

Madame de Vermenoux' house in Paris was situated in the Rue Grange Batelière. There, since her husband's death, she had lived with her only son, and had entertained, in a style befitting her rank and fortune, her coterie of intimates. These were by no means numerous. Being Genevese by birth and education, the Marquise had had no connections in Paris previous to her marriage, and the few friends she had since made there belonged, with the exception of a few people of position, to the literary or financial world.

Like many other women of fashion, she had her little circle of men of letters who came to see her once or twice a week, and discussed with her the latest poems and romances, or—that topic of never-failing interest—the next distribution of academical honours. It was probably in this cultured section of Parisian society that Suzanne was chiefly interested on taking up her residence with the Marquise in the summer of 1764. She had long been acquainted with literary men in her native land, whither, since Voltaire had installed himself at

Ferney, many had gone to pay their respects to the greatest writer of the age. Her intercourse with those she now met in the salon of Madame de Vermenoux represented, therefore, one feature of her new life which was not only already familiar to her, but which, owing to her studious inclinations, must have afforded her the greatest pleasure.

Meanwhile her relations with her benefactress continued to be all that she could desire. If, as was only natural between two women of perfectly different temperaments, each occasionally experienced the ill-humour or irritability of the other, their varying moods did nothing to impair the veritable affection which had sprung up between them. Suzanne, who had now become sincerely attached to the Marquise, could not but feel grateful for the consideration and kindness that lady invariably showed her, and for her evident desire to make her sojourn in the French capital as enjoyable as possible. She was soon to discover, however, that there was one drawback in being companion to a rich woman which she had not anticipated. A few days after her arrival in Paris she began to foresee that it would be extremely difficult to continue to live in the style she was doing, and keep within the limits of her tiny income, which appears to have been derived from her own or her mother's savings. This did not amount, in fact, to more than four hundred livres, or, as we should reckon it, about twenty pounds a

year. With what she had been able to earn by teaching, this minute sum had just sufficed for her simple wants at Geneva, but here in Paris it proved far from adequate to meet the endless expenses of her new position. For although she was residing in the Rue Grange Batelière as the guest of Madame de Vermenoux, the latter gave her no salary in return for her companionship, so that all personal necessaries had to be paid for out of her own pocket.[1] She had soon realised that if she was to assist the Marquise to receive her friends in a suitable manner, it was essential that she should be properly attired, and that thus it would no longer be possible to wear the simple and inexpensive gowns to which she had hitherto been accustomed. In less than a fortnight she was compelled to lay out twelve louis on dresses and hats alone, and this rapid rate of expenditure, though unavoidable, was beginning to cause her considerable alarm. While she was perfectly well aware that had she confided her difficulties to Madame de Vermenoux, that lady would have insisted upon defraying the cost of these items herself, she naturally felt reluctant to employ such a means of extricating herself from this awkward situation. As it was, she was already sufficiently embarrassed by the presents with which the Marquise was continually loading her, and as time went on she was driven to try the hazardous ex-

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

pedient of pretending to be rich in order to put an end to this profuse generosity. Considering how wretchedly inadequate her resources were, such a proceeding, as she speedily discovered, was simply courting disaster, and before many weeks had gone by she found herself faced with the alternative of leaving Paris without settling the debts she had incurred there, or of marrying a man of fortune who would afterwards be able to pay them for her. Before she had actually taken either of these desperate steps, however, she fortunately came in touch with the one individual who of all others was most qualified to help her in the present emergency.

The habitués of the Rue Grange Batelière, while consisting, as we have stated, of a few men of letters, financiers, and one or two persons of social standing, also included people of Madame de Vermenoux' own nationality. Among these was a rising man of business called Jacques Necker, who at the early age of thirty-two had become well known in Paris as a far-sighted and able financier. Though himself of Swiss birth and parentage, he belonged, it is said, to a family of English origin, a branch of which was known to have been settled in Ireland early in the sixteenth century. This Irish branch had embraced the doctrines of the Reformation, with the result that at the time of the persecution of Protestants under Queen Mary, certain members of it had had to take refuge on the Continent, and

had subsequently settled at Custrine. It was in that town that Louis Frédéric Necker, father of Jacques Necker, was born in the year 1686. Early in the eighteenth century Louis Frédéric migrated to Geneva, where he afterwards earned distinction as a Professor of Law at the Academy, and was awarded, as a mark of the esteem in which he was held, the full rights and privileges of a burgher. In the meantime he had married the daughter of M. Gauthier, one of the city magistrates, and had become the father of three sons. Jacques, the second of these, and the only member of the family with whom we shall here concern ourselves, was born in 1732. Since almost from childhood he had displayed a decided aptitude for figures, his father placed him as a clerk in one of the counting-houses of Geneva as soon as he had reached a suitable age. At this period of his life Jacques Necker was, or imagined himself to be, of a literary as well as a business turn of mind. Once or twice he tried his hand at dramatic composition, and his efforts in that direction resulted in two small plays which he never ventured to publish. In course of time he began to find that the monotonous routine of business life in sober, provincial Geneva did not sufficiently satisfy his growing ambitions, so that his parents decided to send him to the celebrated banking establishment of Vernet in Paris, where, they believed, he would have a much wider scope for his powers. He

arrived in Paris about 1749 without either patronage or private means to depend upon. His honesty, perseverance, and unusual ability soon gained him, however, the goodwill of his employer, who gradually promoted him, step by step, to one of the highest positions in the firm. A few years later, when Vernet retired from affairs, he advanced him a large sum of money with which to start a bank of his own. By means of this loan Necker was enabled, in partnership with Thélusson, a man of his own nationality, who possessed considerable financial experience, to found a business house which, under their able management, quickly became extremely prosperous. These were the principal events in his life previous to 1764, the year in which he first met Suzanne Curchod. At the age of thirty-two he was rather heavy and thick-set in appearance, and seemed outwardly to possess but few attractions to appeal to the fair sex beyond a pair of fine eyes, a pleasant, though usually impassive, expression, and a certain dignity of demeanour which singled him out from other men, and gave him an air of distinction. Somewhat reserved by nature, and, in general, disinclined to take part in ordinary conversation, he could nevertheless make himself extremely agreeable when he chose, and on these occasions his charm of manner was considered undeniable.

For some time before Madame de Vermenoux had gone for her cure to Geneva he had constantly fre-

quented her house, and had paid her the most assiduous attentions with the object, it seems, of becoming a suitor to her hand. Though she does not appear to have given him much encouragement, the Marquise had not regarded his courtship with disfavour, and but for the worldly disadvantages to herself that she believed would ensue from such an alliance, she would doubtless, ere this, have accepted him. Her principal objection to doing so lay in the thought that in becoming his wife she would have to relinquish for ever the privileges of her aristocratic position, and descend to that of a financier's wife, who would only be received in certain circles of society where she would find herself on the same obscure and mediocre level as numbers of other women she knew. On the other hand, it could not be denied that Necker was a man who was believed by his friends to have a distinguished career ahead of him, and who might, owing to his rapidly increasing wealth, some day occupy a great position. These had probably been the considerations which had prevented her from altogether rejecting the proposal of marriage that he had made her, and which had led her to postpone indefinitely her final decision. She had done so indeed until the very eve of her departure for Switzerland, and then, yielding at last to her lover's insistence, had promised to give him a decisive answer on her return to Paris in the following summer.

When, therefore, a few months later she arrived home once more, Necker immediately hastened to the Rue Grange Batelière, hoping to learn that she was now prepared to marry him. To his disappointment, however, he found that she was still unable to make up her mind, and that he must content himself with assurances as vague and unsatisfactory as before. But this and the subsequent interviews that took place between them possessed for him a new and additional interest, since his compatriot, Mademoiselle Curchod, was invariably permitted to be present at them. He soon found himself irresistibly attracted not only by the beauty but by the striking qualities of that young lady's character and disposition. It was nothing to him that most of Madame de Vermenoux' women friends considered her "dame de compagnie" rustic and provincial, because she had none of the "polish" acquired by long residence in a smart city, and her obvious contempt for the artifices employed by these ladies to captivate whoever was worth captivating in nowise detracted, in his opinion, from the charm of her personality.

Suzanne, on her side, though already impressed in his favour, had not, however, as yet begun to feel any especial interest in him. For, like every one else who knew the real position of affairs, she fully expected that he would one day marry the Marquise in spite of her present disinclination to unite her lot

with his. She was so certain, indeed, that by dint of perseverance Necker would eventually attain his object, that she was still weighing the rival merits of a variety of different schemes for overcoming her financial difficulties. By the advice of Moultou she had begun seriously to reconsider the advisability of accepting Corrévon, who, encouraged by her friends at home, had continued to press his suit ever since she left Geneva. He had lately so far fallen in with her wishes with regard to her residence at Yverdun as to promise that if she would only consent to marry him he would allow her to spend two months of every year with the Moultous or any one else she pleased.

But even as Suzanne was on the very point of reluctantly accepting this man, with whom she had never for an instant been in love, a change was taking place in Necker's attitude towards Madame de Vermenoux which made her pause for yet a little while longer. With the opening days of autumn it was at last becoming apparent to her that his repeated visits to the Rue Grange Batelière could no longer solely be attributed to his desire to win the Marquise. From his evident wish to cultivate her own society and the pleasure he seemed to derive from it, she was gradually coming to believe that he intended to transfer his affections from the widow to herself. According to her usual custom when faced with a situation that required careful handling, she wrote and confided her conjectures to

Moultou, who, from the proofs she gave him, at once formed the same opinion of the banker's intentions as she had done. Certain, therefore, that she had not been mistaken, she now waited daily, almost hourly, to receive from Necker an open declaration of his love, when she heard to her surprise that he had suddenly left Paris and gone to Geneva. Her feelings of disappointment on receiving this news will the more readily be understood when it is explained that by this time she had fallen in love with Necker herself, and believed that her whole future happiness depended upon the proposal she had expected him to make to her. The sorrows and disappointments she had so often experienced in the past had almost made her despair of ever being able to obtain anything she intensely desired in this life. Necker's sudden departure, without declaring himself, naturally seemed to confirm these pessimistic views of hers, and, as she told Moultou, she now no longer dared to hope for a favourable issue.

Relations between herself and Necker had latterly become so intimate that it appeared to her not improbable that his object in going to Geneva was in order to make inquiries about herself, her family, and her antecedents. But although Moultou had promised her that he would do his best to satisfy Necker on this score, she felt the utmost anxiety lest the latter should hear from some prejudiced quarter particulars concerning her past life—more

especially of her brief career as a governess—which might lead him to form unfavourable conclusions. She understood his temperament well enough to foresee that he would not form his opinion of her solely upon the testimony of Moultou, who he knew to be very closely connected with her, but rather upon that of the world in general, which, being unbiassed, would appear to him more reliable. She therefore decided that if what she expected took place, namely, that on meeting him again she should find her misgivings realised, she would return to Switzerland and marry Corrévon in the following summer.

As soon as he had accomplished what he had set out to do at Geneva, Necker returned to Paris, and a day or two later wrote to beg Mademoiselle Curchod to grant him the favour of a private interview at her earliest convenience. The tone of his letter seems at last to have set all her fears at rest, and it was thus without surprise, though with a sense of the utmost relief and delight, that she subsequently received and accepted his proposal of marriage.

Whether or not Madame de Vermenoux suspected at this stage how far matters had gone between her companion and her former lover it is not easy to say. She could scarcely have been blind to Necker's growing attachment to Mademoiselle Curchod, but since both he and Suzanne had kept her ignorant of the understanding they had come to, it is improbable

that she was yet aware that an engagement had actually been arranged between them.

One authority[1] asserts in her Mémoires that the Marquise had purposely encouraged them to cultivate each other's society, in order to free herself from the attentions of a lover of whom she had begun to tire. This may to some extent have been the case, since in later years she took to herself all the credit of having brought about their marriage, but at the same time the regret she was known to feel at not having accepted Necker herself seems to prove that they had matured their plans entirely without her concurrence.

Suzanne's betrothal being now an accomplished fact, she wrote at once to impart the good news to Moultou, who was naturally overjoyed to hear that she had thus found such a happy solution for all her difficulties. The announcement of her engagement was received, however, with very different feelings by the unfortunate Corrévon. In the last letters she had written him Mademoiselle Curchod had led him to believe that he was about to obtain in her acceptance a well-earned reward for his fidelity and devotion. Great, then, was his disappointment on learning that she had become betrothed to another after what appeared to him a very brief acquaintance, and he now understood but too well that she had never considered him more than a possible husband if she were unable to find another to suit her better. Writing to her a few days later, he

[1] The Baroness d'Oberkirch.

naturally felt justified in pointing this out to her in a way which indicates how bitterly he resented being thus rejected after having waited for her so long and patiently. Yet after thus giving vent to his feelings of very natural mortification, this worthy lawyer concludes his letter by assuring her of his unalterable attachment, and by expressing his heartiest good wishes for her future happiness.

In her own immediate circle of friends the news of Suzanne's engagement to a rich banker was received with unfeigned approval, but in other quarters it was whispered that the opulence of her future husband had influenced not a little her desire to wed him. Her penniless position, her treatment of Corrévon, and M. Necker's wealth seemed to give probability to the story, which received credence among a considerable section of Genevese society. In the end it reached the ears of Necker, who, in a letter he wrote at that time to Moultou, expressed no small contempt for the calculating spirit of those who had invented it. There was, indeed, no truth in this gossip whatever, and we have only to consult the 'Mélanges,' or the testimony of those who knew her, to feel at once convinced that Suzanne's marriage was solely one of affection. She had already become devoted to Necker, and, as we shall see, this devotion developed in the course of years into an adoration which transcended all the other great affections of her life.

The condition of agitation and suspense in which

she had been living during the past few weeks appears to have brought on a recrudescence of the nervous ailment from which she had suffered at the time of her mother's death. Fearing lest their marriage might be indefinitely postponed if she again became seriously ill, Necker decided to hurry on his preparations in order that it might take place as soon as possible.

In the meantime Madame de Vermenoux, though she must ere this have guessed how matters stood between her protégée and Necker, was still kept uninformed of their intentions. It seems not unlikely that Suzanne's very natural desire to avoid an open rupture with the Marquise, as a result of which she might have found herself compelled to leave the Rue Grange Batelière before Necker had completed his arrangements for their marriage, was the real motive for her secrecy.

When at length her wedding day arrived, she left the house without telling Madame de Vermenoux upon what errand she was bent, and a few moments later joined Necker at a Protestant conventicle near by. After a simple ceremony,[1] attended only by the requisite witnesses and a few friends of the bridegroom, she drove off with her husband to his banking house in the Rue Michel le Comte,[2] where,

[1] It is doubtful where this took place. Since Protestants had not then been accorded regular civil rights and privileges, it was probably performed in a private chapel, possibly in that of the Dutch Embassy, where their daughter, Germaine, was afterwards christened.

[2] The Rue Michel le Comte is situated between the Rue Saint Martin and the Rue du Temple in the Marais quarter of Paris.

above the offices on the ground-floor, a pleasant suite of rooms had been prepared for her reception. No longer apprehensive of the consequences that such a confession would entail, she now wrote to inform Madame de Vermenoux of what she had done. Evidently regretting the deception she had felt obliged to practise upon one to whom she owed so much, Suzanne endeavoured to excuse her conduct by stating that the thought of parting from her benefactress had been too painful for her to face, and that this again was the reason why she had not invited her to the wedding.

Madame de Vermenoux' indignation on hearing how her late companion had tricked her can scarcely be thought unreasonable when we remember how entirely she had devoted herself to Suzanne's happiness throughout the time they had lived together. It was not long, however, before her resentment began to subside, and she was then able to consider the matter in a far more indulgent frame of mind. In course of time she not only cordially received the young people at her house, but was often heard to assert to her friends that she alone had been responsible for their marriage. Since she maintained henceforward the friendliest relations with them both, the world was inclined to believe that she had done so. The principal actors in this little romance, however, knew otherwise.

CHAPTER IV.

During the months succeeding her marriage Madame Necker was at first not a little embarrassed to find herself in the entirely new and responsible position of mistress of a large house, with a staff of servants and apparently unlimited means at her disposal. Never before had she experienced the anxieties of housekeeping on so large a scale, and the multiplicity of her new duties often perplexed and bewildered her. Looking back afterwards upon these early days of married life, she is said to have pictured herself always buried in a book of household accounts, ceaselessly adding up figures until she scarcely knew what she was doing.[1] Yet, as she observed in her letters to friends in Switzerland, the intensity of her husband's love amply compensated for all domestic cares and rendered this period one of the happiest of her life. "From the first moment of their union to the last," writes Madame de Staël, "Madame Necker was the supreme object of her husband's existence, his affection being demonstrated by all those tender

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

assiduities, those delicate sentiments, those constant emanations of kindness and tenderness, which can only flow from a devoted heart. Warm and impassioned in all her feelings, Madame Necker would have been miserable in what is commonly called a fortunate marriage, . . . it was necessary to her heart to have selected one only object of affection, and to concentrate in one point all its faculties of tenderness. Happy to have found the being she sought, she was still more happy in being permitted to dedicate to him her whole life."[1]

Such indeed was ever her one desire. No sooner had she become the wife of Necker than she began to assist him in his career by every means in her power, and it was to a great extent with this object in view that she now decided to form a literary salon. By cultivating the society of men of letters she hoped by degrees to be able to secure their support for her husband in the probable event of his entering political life, for they exercised, as she well knew, enormous influence over public opinion, of which, in those days, they represented "the only legal mouthpiece." In desiring to form a connection of this kind, however, she was not only seeking to promote her husband's advancement but to gratify a long-felt wish of her own. Ever since the time when she had presided so successfully over the *réunions* of the "Académie des Eaux de la Poudrière," she had always taken the keenest

[1] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'

interest in literary matters, so that as she was now free to indulge these inclinations it was but natural that she should wish to surround herself with the foremost writers of the day. In forming her circle she was wise enough to consult the famous Madame Geoffrin, who for some years had maintained one of the foremost salons in Paris, and had thus acquired a good deal of valuable experience. By nature, temperament, and education this lady had scarcely anything in common with Madame Necker. Eager, impulsive, and often carried away by her own enthusiasm, the latter was not infrequently guilty, during this early period of her life, of some error of judgment or indiscretion which, on mature reflection, she would probably regret; while Madame Geoffrin, who was shrewd, careful, and extremely cautious, always conducted her social intercourse with the greatest possible delicacy and tact. Having received the scantiest education as a child, she had never even learned to write correctly, and her sphere of reading had been of the most limited description. What little knowledge she had since attained to had chiefly been derived from perpetual intercourse with the sharpest wits in Paris, who had freely discussed in her salon an immense number of different topics.

The daughter of middle-class parents, called Rodet, she was born in Paris in 1699, and at the early age of fourteen had married a rich bourgeois, rejoicing in the name of Geoffrin, who had made

a large fortune in the manufacture of ice. They had one daughter, named Marie Thérèse, who, owing to her parents' wealth, had been able to make a grand marriage with a nobleman of position.

Madame Geoffrin had already reached middle age, and had lost almost every trace of former good looks, when she made up her mind to found what was then known as a "bureau d'esprit." Her imperfect education, in addition to her social obscurity as the wife of a parvenu merchant, had put immense obstacles in her path, which only her extraordinary patience and determination could ever have surmounted. After nearly five-and-twenty years of ceaseless perseverance, however, she at last succeeded in attracting to her house many of the most prominent authors and artists, including, among the former, such men as Diderot, d'Alembert, Marmontel, and Saint Lambert, and among the latter, Vernet,[1] Bouchardon,[2] and Vanloo.[3]

Her chief claim to historical celebrity rests as much, perhaps, upon her connection with these and many other eminent men as upon her intimacy with Stanislas Poniatowski,[4] last King of Poland. This

[1] Claude Joseph Vernet, the celebrated landscape painter; b. 1714, d. 1789.

[2] Edmé Bouchardon, the sculptor; b. 1698, d. 1762.

[3] Charles André (Carle) Vanloo, painter of a number of portraits and of works of a mythological or religious character; b. 1705, d. 1765.

[4] Stanislas Auguste Poniatowski was elected to the Polish throne as Stanislas II. in 1764. Being compelled to abdicate in 1795, he retired in that year to St Petersburg, where he spent the last three years of

friendship had originated from an episode connected with the latter's youth. As a young man, some years before his election to the throne of Poland, Poniatowski had once been imprisoned in Paris for debt. Madame Geoffrin, who often sought to do kind actions in a quiet, unostentatious sort of way, hearing of his plight, paid his debts and procured his release. Poniatowski never forgot this little act of generosity. From that time forward he continually went to see her, and kept up the most affectionate relations with her until her death in 1777.

The cordiality with which this remarkable woman received Madame Necker and at once agreed to second her efforts to found a literary salon in imitation of, if not actually as a rival to, her own does her infinite credit. She would scarcely have consented to do so, perhaps, if she had not felt an instinctive regard for that beautiful young woman. This sentiment was most warmly reciprocated by Madame Necker, who, for her part, soon developed a passionate affection for her new friend, the demonstrative nature of which appears to have caused Madame Geoffrin not a little embarrassment. For that lady's calm and sedate disposition did not permit her to show an excessive attachment for any one, and she was often greatly confused by the effusive warmth of Madame Necker's attentions.

his life as the pensioner of the Emperor Paul I. He was born in 1732 and died in 1798.

Sometimes, when more than usually disconcerted by what she considered an immoderate exhibition of feeling, Madame Geoffrin would write and remonstrate with Madame Necker, stating that she was obliged to do so owing to the anxiety she felt lest such an intense affection should subside as suddenly as it had begun.[1] Yet embarrassing though this infatuation was for her, it fortunately never brought about an estrangement between them, and the attachment she felt for Madame Necker enabled her to bear these impetuous demonstrations with admirable forbearance.

Meanwhile, in the midst of her activities in connection with the project she had formed, an event took place which diverted Madame Necker's thoughts for a short time from all her social ambitions. On the twenty-second of April 1766 she gave birth to a daughter, who received at her baptism the names Anne Louise Germaine. On this interesting occasion Madame de Vermenoux gave proof of her goodwill towards the Neckers by consenting to act as godmother to their child in place of Madame Vernet, who, through disinclination or inability, had declined to do so. Louis Necker,[2]

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

[2] Louis Necker was a banker by profession, and for some years a partner in the Paris firm of Girardot & Haller. Subsequently he founded a "Maison de Commerce" at Marseilles, but relinquished this at the time of his brother's resignation in 1791 and returned to Geneva, his native city, where he spent the remainder of his life; b. 1730, d. 1804.

M. Necker's elder brother, discharged the duties of godfather.

The birth of her daughter was a source of great rejoicing to Madame Necker, for it not only rendered the happiness of her marriage the more complete, but formed at the same time a new and closer link between herself and her husband. Probably at no other period of her life did she ever again so fully appreciate her child as in these days of Germaine's infancy, before differences of temperament had as yet done anything to bring about misunderstandings and alienate affection. But she would assuredly have been hard to satisfy had she not felt delighted with a child that possessed in her nature so much to attract and please. Germaine Necker had inherited her mother's brilliant complexion and beautiful blue eyes, but apart from these advantages her features possessed little beyond the usual attractiveness of childhood. Rather was she remarkable for the extraordinarily intelligent expression of her face and, as she emerged from babyhood, for those curiously precocious and winning little ways which so greatly surprised and amused her parents and their friends.

When able to take up the threads of everyday life once more, Madame Necker returned with renewed energy to the task she had temporarily been obliged to abandon. Her endeavours were crowned with such success that within a comparatively short space of time her salon had become

the resort of a brilliant and representative company of literary men.

The rapidity with which she had accomplished her enterprise, while partly due to the encouragement and assistance she had received from Madame Geoffrin, can also be explained by the influential position of her husband. Towards the end of the summer of 1768 Necker had consented, at the urgent request of the authorities of his native city, to represent the Republic of Geneva at the Court of France. Soon after taking up this diplomatic appointment he was brought before the public eye through his able defence of the French East India Company, which had been falling into disfavour for some time past.

Since most of the Indian possessions of France which had been controlled or administered by that Company had now fallen into English hands, the commerical advantages formerly derived from them had almost ceased to exist. For this reason many had been in favour of the Company's abolition, and the Abbé Morellet, an ecclesiastic with advanced views, with whom we shall meet again shortly, gave expression to a general consensus of opinion through a pamphlet wherein he demonstrated the principal objections to its maintenance. Necker, supported by the Duc de Choiseul,[1] who had lately begun

[1] Etienne François, Comte de Stainville, and afterwards Duc de Choiseul; b. 1719, d. 1785. Twice Minister for Foreign Affairs and once Minister for War under Louis XV. On the death of his friend and ally, Madame de Pompadour, he was disgraced and sent into exile to his château of Chanteloup, where some years later he died.

to show him especial marks of favour, replied to these objections by eloquently defending the Company's utility in a Mémoire[1] which was much discussed by all who had taken any part in the matter. His influence was not yet sufficiently far reaching, however, to prevent its ultimate suppression, which took place a short time afterwards. Nevertheless, the ability he had displayed in defence of it had won him recognition in a way that no business undertaking would ever probably have done. To the men of letters who were beginning to frequent his wife's salon it was naturally of considerable advantage to be able to number among their patrons a man like Necker, who was not only extremely wealthy but also enjoyed the confidence of the all-powerful Duc de Choiseul. Owing to this latter connection they believed that his goodwill might prove of value to them at a time when the Censor's authority was exercised with no little severity, and when their productions were confiscated and they themselves imprisoned upon the smallest pretexts.

But their desire to stand well with him was not the only object that induced them to come to Necker's house in the Rue Michel le Comte. They were attracted by the unusual extent of his wife's literary knowledge, which enabled her to criticise their works with discernment, to form an opinion that was worth listening to, and to give advice

[1] This Mémoire was published in 1769.

which was rarely unprofitable. Besides, it was something of a new and interesting experience, in that age of loose morals, to meet one "whose soul, like Arethusa, preserved its purity in the midst of the waves of the sea."

Acting upon the advice of Morellet, who, as one of her oldest acquaintances in Paris, she had consulted about this important detail, Madame Necker decided to receive her guests on Fridays. Her choice of that day was, indeed, almost inevitable, if she did not wish to hold her assemblies simultaneously with those of any of the other salons which had already been established some years before her own. For on Mondays and Wednesdays Madame Geoffrin received her friends; on Tuesdays the philosopher Helvetius[1] entertained his; and on Thursdays and Sundays men of letters were wont to repair to the house of the Baron d'Holbach.[2]

Fridays, being fast days, offered some inconvenience with regard to the entertainment of those among her guests who conformed to the precepts of the Church of Rome, and although she always took care to provide for them a variety of "plats maigres," it was generally agreed that the repasts she provided were of somewhat doubtful excellence.

[1] Claude Adrien Helvetius had made his fortune as a financier and fermier-général, and in later life became distinguished as a littérateur and philosopher; b. 1715, d. 1771.

[2] Paul Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach, was known in literary circles as the "Premier Maître d'Hôtel de la Philosophie," because his house was for years the resort of the most famous philosophers and free-thinkers of the day; b. 1723, d. 1789.

As the sphere of her acquaintances widened, Madame Necker began to find her apartments in the Rue Michel le Comte too small for her company, and her husband therefore decided to acquire a new and larger house for her in a more fashionable quarter of the city. He chose one situated in the Rue de Cléry. From having been the residence of Claude Leblanc, twice Secretary of State for War in the early years of the century, it was known as the Hôtel Leblanc. The exterior of this stately mansion, with its curved façade and tall windows, presented a very imposing appearance. Within, a broad and splendid staircase, with graceful wrought-iron balustrades, gave access to a fine suite of rooms, the walls of which were adorned with arabesques and medallions, and the ceilings beautifully painted with mythological subjects.[1]

As soon as she and her family had taken up their residence in their new home, which was in every respect more suitable for purposes of entertaining than the house in the Rue Michel le Comte, Madame Necker once more threw open her salon to her ever-growing circle of literary friends.

So far she had confined her invitations to members of the opposite sex, for as yet her women friends were few and far between. Of the latter, in addition to Madame Geoffrin and Madame de Vermenoux, she possessed at present but two others, namely

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

Madame de la Ferté Imbault and Madame de Marchais.

Marie Thérèse, Marquise de la Ferté Imbault, was, as we have said, the only child of Madame Geoffrin. Of a somewhat narrow-minded but well-intentioned disposition, she was in everything the exact opposite to her generous and indulgent mother, and the latter was sometimes heard to say that when she looked at her daughter she felt just like a hen that had hatched a duck's egg! Although it was only thanks to the ample dot with which her parents had provided her that she had ever been able to reach her present exalted position, she was nevertheless an aristocrat to her finger-tips, and usually affected to despise her mother's intellectual and cosmopolitan circle of celebrities. For some time she appears to have classed Madame Necker in something of the same undesirable category, and had treated her with the same indifference as almost every one else she met at Madame Geoffrin's house in the Rue St Honoré. Little by little, however, the Marquise began to realise that this young woman was more worthy of esteem than she had at first supposed. She therefore occasionally went to pay Madame Necker a visit, offered her profuse, though unsolicited, advice upon the selection of suitable acquaintances, and finding that this was taken in good part finally ended by making a friend of her.

As for Madame Necker's friendship with Madame

de Marchais, it was of a far more intimate description.

Julie de Laborde, Madame de Marchais, and later Comtesse d'Angeviller, was the wife of one of the king's first valets de chambre, and occupied, by virtue of her husband's purely nominal appointment, a comfortable suite of apartments in the Louvre. Distinguished neither by birth nor breeding, she had originally sprung into social prominence through a distant relationship with Madame de Pompadour, and for many years "her salon embraced all the most respected people of the day, and in the domain of culture all that was highest and most distinguished."

Of minute size, without any pretensions to beauty, beyond her lovely fair hair and well-proportioned figure, her principal attractions lay in her bright, lively, and vivacious disposition, and her eyes that seemed always "brimming over with fun." She possessed an extraordinary power of guessing other people's thoughts, and this gift she was fond of using in a way that her friends must often have found extremely disconcerting. "Yet for all this," we are told, "her nature was of the sweetest, and singularly obliging to others." [1]

Madame Necker, who met her for the first time in 1764, was instantly captivated by her sprightliness and animation, and imagined her to be endowed

[1] Mémoires de Marmontel.

with every imaginable virtue. So attached did she become, indeed, to this fairylike little woman, that for a short while she seems to have spent nearly all her spare time in Madame de Marchais' society. The latter was unable to return this deep affection, although, as many of her letters attest, she was at that time sincerely devoted to Madame Necker. She was, in truth, too much absorbed in a love-affair with the Comte d'Angeviller[1] to be able to find room in her heart for any other great attachment. Chaperoned by Madame Necker, she was always contriving secret meetings with this fascinating young man, who, because of his good looks, was dubbed by his friends "The Angel Gabriel." New, at that time, to such clandestine meetings between married women and their lovers, Madame Necker was at first surprised and a little shocked by what she considered a lamentable want of propriety in her friend. Yet as soon as she realised the innocent nature of these assignations, she not only accepted them as inevitable but regarded M. d'Angeviller in the light of a perfectly honourable lover.

Madame Necker's friendship for Madame de Marchais was brought to an abrupt ending through a paltry misunderstanding which, had the latter exercised a little more indulgence, ought never to have had such a disastrous sequel. It came about in this way. One evening Madame de Marchais

[1] Charles Claude de Flahaut, Comte de la Billarderie d'Angeviller, Directeur-général des bâtiments du roi, &c.; born —— (?), died 1810.

had invited the poet Rocher to recite some verses in her salon before a distinguished company that included the Maréchale de Luxembourg, the Comte and Comtesse de Broglie, and Madame Necker. Now Madame Necker had already heard these verses recited on a previous occasion, and therefore decided to go to the Louvre at a later hour than that at which she had been invited. On the way thither she called at the house of Madame Saurin, where several of her acquaintances had gathered to listen to a recitation by the great contemporary critic, La Harpe. Among them she saw Rocher, who was on the point of departing to keep his engagement with Madame de Marchais, but who, at her request, consented to remain until the end of the recitation and then go on to the Louvre with her. In the meantime Madame de Marchais, who, having heard nothing to the contrary, had expected them both to arrive at the appointed time, was forced, to her infinite annoyance, to keep her other guests waiting an hour and a half for their promised entertainment. When at length Madame Necker and Rocher appeared, she received the former with extreme coldness and hauteur, refused to listen to any of her apologies, and persistently ignored her for the rest of the evening. This regrettable want of consideration on Madame Necker's part was subsequently made by Madame de Marchais a pretext for breaking off all further relations with her. Henceforward she declined ever again to receive

Madame Necker at her house, and their friendship, thus severed, was never afterwards renewed.

This sudden and complete rupture between two women who, until that time, had been the greatest friends, appears, however, to have had another and a far more adequate cause than Madame Necker's thoughtlessness. For it is believed in a great measure to have been due [1] to Madame de Marchais' growing jealousy of the consideration and respect that her friend enjoyed from people in the best circles of society, from many of whom she herself, with all her wit and brilliance, could only obtain a kind of indulgent toleration.

These four women were at present, then, the only ones with whom Madame Necker could consider herself to be on terms of any intimacy, and though she was quickly making the acquaintance of others, her entry into Parisian society was still too recent to permit her to entertain them at her house. In the meantime, however, she was perfectly well satisfied with what she had already achieved in other directions—namely, with having attracted to her Fridays a goodly sprinkling of encyclopædists, philosophers, poets, and romance writers. Among them her three principal friends were at first Thomas, Marmontel, and the Abbé Morellet, all of whom had been for some years prominent members of the salon of Madame Geoffrin.

The first of these, Antoine Léonard Thomas, was

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

born at Clermont Ferrand in 1732, and was the junior member of a family of seventeen. A brilliant career at school had been the means of securing him at an early age a professorship in the College of Beauvais, and during his residence in that town he had devoted much of his leisure to the development of his literary tastes. His early efforts meeting with success, he was offered by Watelet,[1] the academician, a grant of 1200 francs a-year. He declined this offer, however, being convinced that he would be able to make his way in the world without need of assistance.

Nominated secretary to the Duc de Praslin, Minister for Foreign Affairs, in 1762, he published in the following year his 'Éloge de Sully,' one of the most important of his panegyrics. This work, which was partly intended to criticise the corruption and decadence that existed in the higher classes of society, gave not a little offence to courtiers and tax-collectors, whose many shortcomings he had openly denounced.

While he was often to be found at the house of Madame Geoffrin, Thomas had hitherto been little seen elsewhere, for weak health and comparative poverty rendered it difficult for him to take his place in the society of his equals, even if his proud

[1] Claude-Henri Watelet; b. 1718, d. 1786. He was the author of several poems and romances and a few works on Art. His house, "La Moulin Joli," on the banks of the Seine, was for some years the rendez-vous of prominent authors and artists.

and sensitive nature had not made him disinclined to do so.

Until his introduction to Madame Necker, soon after her marriage, by their mutual friend the Comte d'Angeviller, he had never enjoyed the friendship of any woman before. To his great satisfaction he found in her a friend who was not only able to understand the hidden depths of his somewhat complex nature, but one who could give him unsparingly the sympathy and encouragement for which he had always craved but seldom met with. Owing, perhaps, to their laborious prolixity, and to the somewhat pompous style in which they were written, his works had latterly won but little appreciation either from contemporary writers or the general public. But Madame Necker, who understood and admired the lofty principles and ideals by which they had been inspired, was able to overlook their defects in her appreciation of their merits. Between herself and Thomas there was an affinity of ideas upon many questions which made his society and conversation at all times more welcome to her than those of any of her other friends. As the result of her deep respect for his character, she soon began to feel a personal affection for him, and this, becoming strengthened and confirmed in course of time, gradually led her to regard his opinions as indisputable. Finally, so great was the esteem in which she held him that she came to

consider "each one of his ideas a virtue in itself, and his every action an example." [1]

Thomas repaid her friendship with a passionate and unchanging devotion which, though he never allowed it to overstep the bounds of moderation, he sometimes felt considerable difficulty in controlling. He became accustomed to confide to her all the difficulties and disappointments of his life, and whenever, as often happened, he would leave Paris to spend some weeks with his mother and sister at his little house at St Germain, a frequent exchange of letters took place between them.

The intimate ties by which these two were bound are admirably described in a few sentences from the pen of Thomas himself, which we find in Necker's Introduction to the 'Mélanges.'

"My opinions, feelings, and ideas," he writes, "either perfectly agree with hers or purify and perfect themselves in contact with hers. She inspires me with greater affection for everything I care for and with more contempt for everything that I despise or cannot bear. She has but one object, or rather two, which to her are only one, namely, enlightenment and virtue. She instructs her mind only in order to improve her soul, and every one of her ideas resolves itself into a moral impression; that is the road she has followed all her life; thus has she attained to a purity and elevation of

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker.

character which has few equals, and which is so far superior to the country and age in which she lives. Few people really know her; and her soul is one of those religious sanctuaries which one cannot enter without feeling moved with respect and emotion. I am fortunate enough to share some of her opinions, but I am far from having made the same use of them as she has done—but I have at least the merit of liking to live with her, and when I see her that which I should wish to be consoles me for what I am not. Every hour I spend in her society leaves a deep and tender impression upon my inmost heart which, by giving me a desire to come into closer touch with her, makes me more satisfied with myself; but this idea is to me like that of the infinite, which for mortal man is only a quantity to which he adds perpetually without ever being able to reach the ultimate goal."

A man of quite another stamp was Jean François Marmontel, author of the 'Contes Moraux,' and still more famous 'Bélisaire.' Of obscure origin, and even humbler parentage, he was born at the little town of Bort, Limouse, in 1723. Educated by the Jesuits of Mauriac until he reached the age of fifteen, he then went to study philosophy at the College of Clermont, where it is said that he provided for himself by the money he earned from teaching those among his fellow-scholars who had not reached so high a standard of efficiency as himself. After completing his education at

Toulouse he went to Paris in 1746, with the intention of devoting himself henceforward to a literary career. With scarcely any private means to fall back upon, he was practically dependent for a livelihood upon what he could earn by writing, so that, before attaining celebrity, he had to pass through a period of some difficulty and hardship. Fortunately, however, a few of his early productions had attracted the attention of Voltaire, from whom he now received considerable encouragement. By the advice of that great philosopher he decided to write for the stage, and between the years 1748 and 1750 produced three tragedies—namely, 'Denys le Tyran,' 'Aristomène,' and 'Cléopâtre,' which, though much commented upon in literary circles, cannot be said to have been entirely successful. Afterwards he turned his attention to writing operas, many of which were set to music by Rameau, but here again his powers only met with very moderate recognition. Incidentally, however, he had won the good graces of Madame de Pompadour, and through her influence was nominated "Secrétaire des bâtiments" in 1753. Three years later appeared the first of his famous 'Contes Moraux,' which obtained universal popularity, and placed him at once among "les auteurs à la mode." But though he had made his name, his difficulties were not yet ended. Not long after the publication of the 'Contes Moraux' he was imprisoned in the Bastille

for having dared to hold up to ridicule the Duc d'Aumont, "premier gentilhomme de la chambre," in a parody upon a scene from "Cinna," which he was erroneously believed to have written. Though he knew that Cury, "Intendant des Menus-Plaisirs," was the real author of this parody, he preferred to suffer punishment himself rather than that the former should lose his appointment as a result of his indiscretion. Marmontel's conduct in this affair was the more magnanimous, since for his supposed offence he was deprived of his rights in the 'Mercure,' which had been worth to him an income of between fifteen and eighteen thousand livres, a sum which at that time he could ill afford to lose. This adventure had, of course, been very widely discussed in all the literary salons of the day, so that subsequently, when his innocence was proved and he was released from prison, he found himself acclaimed as something of a hero. In 1763, thanks to the merits of his 'Poétique Française,' Marmontel was elected a member of the Academy, and not long afterwards, upon the publication of 'Bélisaire,' his great political romance, he became once more a centre of interest. Although it was violently criticised and condemned by the Church party, this work probably did more to extend its author's reputation than anything else he had previously written. He received for it the congratulations of many of the crowned heads of

Europe, and later the important appointment of "Historiographe de France."[1]

It was during this brilliant period of his career, a year or so before the appearance of 'Bélisaire,' that he first made the acquaintance of M. and Madame Necker. His introduction to them, which he describes so graphically in his 'Mémoires,' took place at a "bal bourgeois." It appears that on that occasion Madame Necker, having heard his name mentioned by some one present, immediately went and made herself known to him, politely saying "that ever since her arrival in Paris her desire had been to know the author of the 'Contes Moraux,'" and added "that she hoped he would do herself and M. Necker the honour of coming to see them." This invitation, which Marmontel at once accepted, was the beginning of a connection between himself and the Neckers that was to last for nearly five-and-twenty years. But in spite of the hospitality he so often received from her and the favour she always showed him, his description of the mistress of the Hôtel Leblanc is far from complimentary. He criticises her in a way that would lead his readers to suppose that he had only reluctantly cultivated her society, and had never considered her otherwise than a tiresome and pretentious woman, without any of the charms or attractions of her sex. At the same time it

[1] Mémoires de Marmontel.

must be remembered that though he speaks so disparagingly of Madame Necker in his 'Mémoires,' he was ever, in his personal relations with her, upon the best of terms; moreover, if the flattering expressions contained in his letters to her are in any degree sincere, he must certainly have felt the highest admiration for her virtue, her piety, and her learning.

His "portrait" of her as she appeared to him at the time he first met her is found in the following sentences: "Unacquainted with the manners and customs of Paris, Madame Necker had none of the charms of a young Frenchwoman. In her behaviour and conversation there was nothing of the air or bearing of a woman educated in the school of the arts or formed in that of society. She had no taste in her dress, no ease in her demeanour, no charm in her politeness, and her mind as well as the expression of her face was too carefully adjusted to possess grace. Her most attractive qualities were those of decorum, sincerity, and kindliness of heart. A virtuous education and solitary studies had given her soul every improvement which talents and an exemplary disposition can derive from cultivation. The gracefulness of ease, facility, and 'abandon' were unknown to her. She did not approve of familiarity even in conversation, and it was sometimes entertaining to see to what a point she carried this fastidiousness." [1]

[1] Mémoires de Marmontel.

Although he was never received by her upon the same footing of intimacy as Thomas or Buffon, Marmontel was always one of the favoured members of Madame Necker's circle, less, we are inclined to think, by reason of his personal characteristics, than because of those brilliant gifts which had placed him in the forefront of contemporary writers, and which had made him an ornament to every house he frequented.

The Abbé Morellet, who Madame Necker had known in the salon of Madame de Vermenoux, a short time previous to her marriage, completes this trio of her first acquaintances in the Parisian world of letters.

André Morellet was born at Lyons in 1727. After completing his early education at the Jesuit college in his native city, he went to Paris at the age of fourteen, and entered the "Séminaire des Trente-trois," in order to prepare himself for the Church. Later he continued his studies for some years at the Sorbonne, where he had as fellow-students Turgot and Loménie de Brienne, who were both destined to play so conspicuous a part in politics during the years immediately preceding the Revolution. His course at the Sorbonne ended, Morellet accepted a post as tutor to the son of M. de la Galaizière, Chancellor to the King of Poland, and afterwards went with his charge for an extensive tour in Italy. When this was concluded he returned to Paris, and began at once to identify himself with Diderot, d'Alembert, and the

other philosophers, becoming at the same time a member of Madame Geoffrin's circle, in which his wit, learning, and controversial gifts received the warmest appreciation. Priest as he had now become, his religious views were nevertheless almost those of a freethinker, and his friends belonged exclusively to the anti-clerical party. On several notable occasions he gave proof of his attachment to the philosophers by ably defending their cause against the attacks of their numerous opponents, and, by throwing in his lot with the Encyclopædists, he again defined the trend of his advanced opinions. To judge by these alone there would seem to have been but little in common between himself and Madame Necker. Behind his views, however, lay another side to his character which, with unerring intuition, she had at once detected. For all his avowed scepticism of religious truths, she saw that the Abbé possessed so many high principles, so many excellent and amiable qualities, that she could not but forgive the former in her respect and admiration for the latter.

As years went by a whole host of other learned celebrities, whom we shall proceed to make known to our readers in the following pages, began to attend Madame Necker's Fridays at the Hôtel Leblanc, which, thanks to the opulence of its owner and to the attractive personality of his wife, gradually obtained the reputation of being one of the most popular houses in Paris.

CHAPTER V.

In the last chapter we have stated that among her earlier friends in Paris, Thomas occupied the principal place in Madame Necker's affection and esteem. A few years after the beginning of her connection with that writer, however, she was to meet in the salon of Madame de Marchais a man of far greater celebrity in another sphere, who subsequently became one of her closest intimates. This was the great naturalist George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. Of imposing height and dignified bearing, M. de Buffon bore in his features distinct marks of his great intellectual gifts. In society, where, however, he was but seldom seen, his manners, though engaging, were considered a trifle artificial, and his clothes, probably very out of date, were thought extremely eccentric. But behind these external peculiarities lay a warm heart and a high-principled character, and by those who knew him intimately his kind and obliging disposition, the delight he evinced in the success of his friends, and his readiness on all occasions to assist them, were universally admired.

Already well past middle age [1] at the time he first became acquainted with Madame Necker, he could then look back with satisfaction upon a long and successful career, devoted to the study of science and natural history. For although he belonged to a privileged class which did not usually choose a profession outside the Church, the Army, or the Court, he had wisely decided to set aside convention and follow his natural inclinations. After making an extensive tour through France, Italy, and Switzerland, he betook himself to London in 1733, and there spent much of his time translating English scientific words into his own language. When eventually he returned to France his abilities were soon recognised by his election to a membership of the Academy of Sciences and by the Royal appointment of "Intendant du jardin du roi." The next ten years of his life were wholly given up to research in preparation for his 'Histoire Naturelle,' the first volume of which appeared in 1749. This famous work, which eventually comprised fifteen volumes, not only aroused intense interest in scientific circles, but introduced "into all ranks of society" a taste for the study of nature which had never before been equalled. Buffon's celebrity was afterwards enhanced by other productions dealing with the same subject, such as his 'Théorie de la Terre,' 'Idées générales sur les Animaux,' and 'L'Histoire de l'Homme.'

[1] He was born in 1707.

The immense popularity which these enjoyed was partly due to the novelty of the science of natural history itself, and partly to the charm of the author's style, which, in the opinion of the "beau monde," was considered to possess the most marvellous fascination, poetry, and grace.

Since the death of his wife, to whom he had been deeply attached, in 1769, Buffon had lived in great retirement at Montbard, where the château and estates of his family were situated. Here, except for the servants who looked after him, he lived entirely alone, and his solitude was only occasionally enlivened by short visits from his son, at that time serving in the army, or by his own brief sojourns in Paris. Into this melancholy and secluded existence, which, in loyalty to his wife's memory, he felt no wish to change, there came at last, after his introduction to Madame Necker, a new and absorbing interest. In spite of their great difference in age, a close and intimate friendship soon sprang up between them, inspired by an intense veneration on her side, and by a tender, whole-hearted admiration on his. In the 'Mélanges,' where his name so often recurs, Madame Necker expresses in the following terms something of the mingled feelings of affection and awe with which his greatness inspired her. "When I see him," she states, "my heart deceives me in two ways directly contrary to each other; I believe I am admiring him for the first time, and I think that I have loved him all my life." And

again: "Nature's greatest miracle is a man of genius; and M. de Buffon has never talked to me about the wonders of this world without making me think that he was one of them."

The sentiments of affectionate admiration that Buffon so warmly expressed for her, both in his conversation and his letters, were the more appreciated by Madame Necker since she knew that he entertained them for no other woman but herself. And it was also a source of some pride to her that he should freely discuss with her, as he often did, matters of personal interest to himself which he would never have mentioned to any one else. Whenever his duties in connection with the superintendence of the Royal Gardens called him to Paris, Buffon never failed to present himself either at the Hôtel Leblanc or at the Neckers' country house outside the city, where he could always count upon a warm welcome and an hour's delightful conversation with the woman he so much esteemed.

Although Madame Necker felt an unbounded respect for the opinions of her learned friend with regard to most subjects, his point of view of religion was one that had always caused her some misgiving. Her own deep-rooted convictions made her attach immense importance to a proper profession of faith, either Catholic or Protestant, on the part of all her friends; and if they could not conform to the tenets of Calvin, she at least expected them to fulfil the requirements of the Church of Rome. Buffon, she

Georges Louis Leclerc Comte de

BUFFON

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observed with regret, was accustomed to refer to the Almighty in his books as the "Creator of the world" or the "Author of things," and she had often heard him openly assert that he thought every one should adopt whatever religion suited him best. She considered this broad-minded, almost equivocal, attitude towards such a subject much to be deplored, and often in the course of their discussions would express her disapproval of his apparent scepticism, and beg him to set her mind at rest by giving her a satisfactory explanation of his views. These doubts remained with her throughout all the years of their friendship, however, and it was not until shortly before Buffon's death, in 1788, that they were at length dispelled. During the later stages of his last illness she came herself to tend him, and it was then, on realising that his end was approaching, that he made an open acknowledgment of the principles of Christianity, and afterwards with great fervour received the Sacraments.[1]

Among other conspicuous members of her circle was Diderot, prince of philosophers, and compiler of the famous Encyclopædia, which was one of the most widely discussed productions of those days.

Denis Diderot was born at Langres in 1713, and belonged to a family of cutlers who had carried on a prosperous trade in that town for upwards of two hundred years. Destined by his family for an ecclesiastical career, he was educated first at the

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

Jesuit college at Langres and afterwards at the Collége d'Harcourt in Paris. His studies at the latter institution influenced his ideas in a direction so strongly opposed to religion that upon the completion of his education he declined to take orders, and yet further increased the disappointment of his parents by refusing to adopt any other profession instead. At this juncture, however, he was befriended by an attorney, who, noting his unusual abilities, did his best to turn them to account. Diderot showed, however, no greater inclination for a legal than he had done for an ecclesiastical career, and on being asked by the worthy *avoué* to what other calling he intended to devote himself, he replied that since, for the present, he was perfectly content to pursue his classical and mathematical studies, he did not propose to take up any other more remunerative line of work. Seeing that his father, who had become enraged by his continued obstinacy, had refused to support him further until he should come to his senses, this decision was extremely imprudent. In order to keep himself from starving he was soon compelled to give instruction in those subjects in which he had become proficient. But, though he had no lack of employment, his clients rarely paid him for his services, preferring to show their gratitude by a present of books or an occasional dinner. Owing to this unsatisfactory mode of recompense he found himself often penniless, and was obliged to apply to his

father for assistance. While the latter invariably refused to comply with this request, his mother, who was less hard-hearted than her husband, secretly contrived to send money to her son by the hand of a trusty servant, who covered the sixty leagues between Langres and Paris on foot, and sometimes added part of his own savings to the contents of the packet he was bearing.

After encountering many other vicissitudes, in the course of which he was frequently almost destitute, Diderot married in 1743 a Mademoiselle Campion, who, with her mother, had been a fellow-lodger in the same house as himself, and had nursed him through a dangerous illness some two years before. In spite of her good looks and estimable character, Madame Diderot was by nature too simple and commonplace to be able to monopolise for very long the affection of a man of her husband's susceptible disposition, and the happiness of her married life was soon clouded by his discreditable connections, first with a Madame de Puisieux and then with the actress, Mademoiselle Voland.

Much of Diderot's earlier work was produced less in order to support his family than to pay the debts of the first of these two women, to whom he remained attached for upwards of ten years. Of the works belonging to the opening years of his career, two caused no little stir in society at the time they were published, and were also fortunate enough to obtain the approval of Voltaire. These were his

'Pensées philosophiques' and 'Lettres sur les Aveugles.' The reception they met with in other quarters, however, was far less flattering to their author than the congratulations he received from the Patriarch of Ferney. All existing copies of the former were ordered by the Censor to be burnt, and soon after the appearance of the latter an order was issued for Diderot's arrest and imprisonment.

It seems not a little surprising to find this man, whose morals were scarcely more depraved than the tone of many of his books, in the salon of such a pillar of virtue as Madame Necker. But we must bear in mind that his brilliant gifts, and his close connection with several of the principal members of her circle, made his presence at her Fridays almost indispensable. From his own account of his introduction to her, Diderot appears to have believed that it was his personal attractions alone that had procured him the *entrée* to her salon. Such, surely, can never have been the case. For however ardently Madame Necker may have desired to secure his attendance at her assemblies, she was too well aware of his notorious failings to have any desire to cultivate his friendship, and at first, at any rate, it was his genius rather than his personality which attracted her. In after years, when he had become one of her most constant guests, and had at last fully realised her nobility of character, Diderot understood, probably for the first time in his life, what respect for a woman

DENIS DIDEROT.

Né à Langres, le 5 octobre, 1713. Mort à Paris le 30 juillet, 1784.

Salons Tome IX. P. 421 et T. X. P. 153.

meant. Henceforward he took pains to disguise from her his evil qualities, and to exclude from his conversations in her presence those despicable opinions to which he was but too apt to give expression before his other friends. In his 'Paradoxe du Comédien' he describes Madame Necker "as a woman who possesses everything which purity of soul can add to refinement of taste." This graceful tribute of admiration is confirmed in certain passages of his correspondence with her, in which he deeply regrets that he had not known her sooner, for he felt convinced that had he done so her influence might have saved him from actions of which he had come to feel ashamed.

The name of Diderot recalls that of d'Alembert, another celebrated philosopher, who collaborated with him in the earlier work of the Encyclopædia.

Though for many years a familiar figure in the salon of Madame Necker, d'Alembert cannot be said to have ever reached the same degree of intimacy with her as most of her other literary friends. For a long time their relations remained upon a footing of polite and mutual indifference, which was not exchanged for a feeling of greater cordiality until after the death of Julie de l'Espinasse, to whom d'Alembert had been passionately devoted for over twenty years. On that occasion Madame Necker, who had both known and admired Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, wrote and condoled with him on the loss he had sustained by her death, and

her sympathetic letter, which was much appreciated by the broken-hearted lover, became the basis of a better understanding between them.

Jean Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert was the illegitimate son of the Marquise or Chanoinesse de Tencin, a lady of notoriety under the Regency, and of the Chevalier Destouches, "Commissaire Provincial d'Artillerie." Soon after his birth, in 1717, he was abandoned on the steps of the Church of Saint Jean le Rond, from which his baptismal name was taken, and from which he was rescued by a passing soldier and taken to the Foundling Hospital. He only remained there for a short time, however, for a few days later he was "put to nurse" at the village of Crémery, near Montdidier, in Picardy. Meanwhile his father, the Chevalier, was employing every means he could think of to discover the whereabouts of his child, and when at last he succeeded in doing so, Jean Baptiste was brought back to Paris and placed under the care of Madame Rousseau, the wife of a poor glazier living in the Faubourg St Antoine. With this worthy woman, who soon came to look upon him as her own son, d'Alembert lived for forty years, and would probably have done so for an even longer period had not a serious illness, which endangered his life, compelled him to seek less confined and healthier quarters elsewhere.

When M. Destouches died, in 1726, he bequeathed to his son an income of 1200 livres, and this long

sufficed for d'Alembert's simple wants until, in course of time, it was augmented by pensions from Louis XV. and Frederic of Prussia, and by a legacy from Hume.

His education meantime had not been neglected. First at a small pension, and later at college, his rare intellectual talents had attracted the attention of his masters, who were convinced that he would one day make his mark in the world. As he grew older he devoted himself entirely to scientific studies, and these eventually bore fruit in a 'Mémoire sur le calcul intégral,' which established his reputation as a distinguished mathematician, and gained him admittance to the Academy of Sciences. This took place about 1741, and it was in that same year that he is supposed to have been "discovered" by Madame Geoffrin, who at once raised him from his position of social obscurity to one of brief though widespread celebrity in the salons. His appearance at the various assemblies, to which he was soon invited, excited the utmost interest, not so much by reason of his great abilities, as because of his illustrious, though illegitimate, origin and his extremely original personality. For "the simplicity of his manners, the purity of his morals, the sincerity of his character, and his air of youthfulness, united to all his talents, greatly astonished those who saw him for the first time." [1]

[1] Marquis de Sainte Aulaire, 'Correspondance complète de Madame du Deffand.'

"He was built on the small scale, slight, moderately well dressed, 'his hair negligently combed,' but of perfectly presentable manners and appearance, . . . and a malicious gleam in his eyes, and frank features, united to give his face a certain attractiveness."[1] His principal defects lay in a harsh and rasping voice, which some people found intolerable, and an attitude towards those he only slightly knew which gave the impression that he was "cold, dry, caustic, and bitterly ironical." "He was not equally well judged by every one; and many saw nothing more in him than a young man without the usages of society, and to them his frankness and simplicity seemed vulgar ingenuousness."[2] The disadvantages of his upbringing in a family of ouvriers, and the atmosphere of poverty in which he had lived throughout his youth, account, of course, for this want of polish, which he would probably only have acquired after long intercourse with polite and refined acquaintances. The popularity which he enjoyed for a time in the salons was not due to his fame as a scientist but to his marvellous powers of mimicry, "unquenchable high spirits," and inexhaustible fund of witty and amusing anecdotes. One day it dawned upon him that it was to these purely superficial gifts, and to them alone, that he owed the favour and hospitality of most of his fashionable friends, and that without them he

[1] Marquis de Ségur, 'Julie de l'Espinasse'; translated from the French, and published by Chatto & Windus.

[2] Madame du Deffand's 'Correspondance.'

would probably have remained for ever in the humble surroundings in which Madame Geoffrin had found him. This want of appreciation for talents that he knew were of no common order he resented the more deeply, because he attributed it to "the equivocal position" in which his birth had placed him. Rather than submit to further condescension from people who, beyond the fact that he amused them, "never deemed him worth a more serious thought," he resolved to return to a life of seclusion, and "seek in himself for the means of combating his misfortune." He reasoned that being a child of nature, "he ought only to consult or obey nature; . . . that nothing was either above or beneath him; that only virtue or vice, talents or stupidity, deserve respect or contempt; that liberty is a wise man's real fortune, and that one is always able to acquire and enjoy it by avoiding the passions and all occasions which can give them birth." D'Alembert's liberal and philosophical opinions, which are the keynote of many of his writings, brought him in touch with Voltaire and other great philosophers, including Diderot, with whom, as has been said, he worked upon the formation of the Encyclopædia. To this he contributed a number of articles, but when later a storm of censure was raised against it by the Church party, he ceased to take any further part in the venture, valuing peace and tranquillity above all considerations of profit.

Yet apart from his connection with that great work and his numerous contributions to the scientific literature of the period, d'Alembert's name will ever be associated with that of Julie de l'Espinasse, the fascinating companion of Madame du Deffand.

The story of his attachment to that ill-fated young lady has so recently been narrated by the Marquis de Ségur,[1] that we shall not venture to dwell upon it again at length in these pages.

Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, as our readers will remember, was the natural child of the Comtesse d'Albon and Count Gaspard de Vichy, Madame du Deffand's elder brother. After the death of her mother, who had dearly loved her and had brought her up on equal terms with her legitimate children, she had gone to live at the Château of Champrond with Count Gaspard and his wife. The latter, by birth a d'Albon, was her step-sister, and, through marriage with Count Gaspard, her step-mother as well. This was a most unfortunate relationship, which not unnaturally became the cause of unending friction between Julie and her step-sister.

In the summer of 1752, not long after she had come to make her home at Champrond, Julie made the acquaintance of her father's sister, the Marquise du Deffand, who, menaced with total blindness, had fled from Paris to hide her affliction in the depths of the country. Madame du Deffand soon became greatly attracted by her, and, realising her difficult

[1] *Vide* 'Julie de l'Espinasse.'

position at the château as the unacknowledged daughter of M. de Vichy, determined to do her best to help her. Thus, on the conclusion of her visit, she invited Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse to return with her to Paris, to the convent of Saint Joseph where she then resided. As yet, however, Julie valued her liberty far too highly to exchange it for a situation which she felt would inevitably curtail it, even though acceptance would have afforded her a means of escape from the uncongenial atmosphere of Champrond, and from the petty indignities to which her step-sister was so constantly subjecting her. But though she had declined the offer of a home in Paris, she had now made up her mind to seek one for herself elsewhere. She retired to a convent in the neighbouring town of Lyons, and would probably have made this her permanent residence had she not failed to obtain the necessary funds to secure for herself a complete independence. As a result of this disappointment she was compelled at last to fall back upon Madame du Deffand's proposal, which still remained open for her to accept. She arrived at the convent of Saint Joseph, in Paris, towards the end of April 1754. Her introduction to d'Alembert, who was then the favourite protégé of Madame du Deffand, took place soon afterwards.

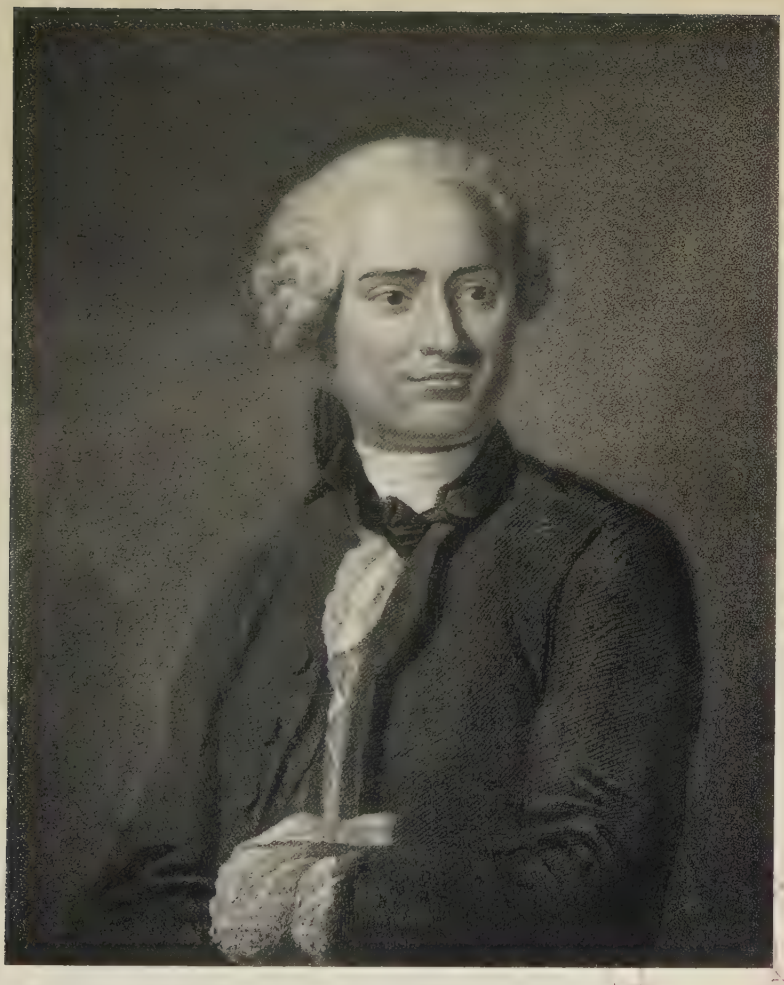
What more natural than that this recluse, who had never loved before, should fall an immediate victim to the irresistible fascination of this "charm-

ing girl, like himself an orphan, nameless and without fortune, of exquisite intelligence and manner, and almost thrust upon his daily notice in the dangerous and delicious intimacy of his old friend's home"?[1]

Unfortunately Julie herself, though doubtless flattered by the attentions of so brilliant a lover, was unable to reciprocate the passion she had inspired. To the end of her days she was never able to feel more for d'Alembert than a deeply sincere sympathy, absolute trust, and warm gratitude for his devotion.

Gradually, as their friendship ripened into intimacy, Madame du Deffand, who in spite of her blindness was perfectly well aware of what was going on, became secretly jealous of d'Alembert's growing fondness for her young companion. She soon began to show her resentment by addressing caustic little remarks to the latter, which sometimes contained allusions to Julie's unfortunate origin. D'Alembert became in time ever more completely enslaved by her charms, but either through natural timidity or because he feared rejection, carefully avoided an open declaration of his love. His attachment was at this stage when he set out on a visit to Berlin, to spend some months there as the guest of King Frederic. A few days before his departure one of the most painful incidents of his life took place. His mother,

[1] Marquis de Ségur, 'Julie de l'Espinasse.'



D'ALEMBERT.

From the original Picture by De La Tour in the collection of the Institute of France.

the Marquise de Tencin, seized with a sudden desire to set eyes on her celebrated son, wrote to ask him to come and see her. Naturally incensed at such a request from one who, for over forty years, had entirely ignored his existence, d'Alembert was at first disposed to pay no heed to it. After reflection, however, and upon the understanding that Madame Rousseau, his foster-mother, should accompany him on his distasteful errand, he at length decided to comply with his mother's wishes. The interview, as was only to be expected, was an embarrassing not to say distressing one. Although Madame de Tencin received him with much friendliness, d'Alembert returned her overtures with such frigid and disconcerting politeness that at last, overcome by his uncompromising attitude, she suddenly exclaimed: "But I am your mother!" "You my mother," retorted d'Alembert, flinging himself into the arms of Madame Rousseau, "no, she is here; I know no other!" [1]

On his arrival at Berlin he was received by the King of Prussia with the utmost cordiality. Frederic, who had long been an enthusiastic admirer of his abilities, pressed him to accept the Presidency of the Academy of Berlin and a residency at Potsdam. His Majesty had already offered this post to d'Alembert on a former occasion, but the latter had then declined it, not

[1] 'Correspondance littéraire de Grimm et Diderot,' vol. xii. pp. 22, 23.

wishing, he said, to deprive others of an honour to which he felt they were more entitled than himself. Now, in addition to these objections he was less than ever disposed to forsake his native country and the society of the woman he adored in order to take up an appointment, the advantages of which, considering Frederic's fickle temperament, would probably prove of short duration. Once more, therefore, to the bitter disappointment of his Royal host, he unhesitatingly declined to accept it.

In connection with his visit to Berlin in 1763 the following anecdote has often been related. One day Frederic, discussing the lately concluded Seven Years' War, asked his guest "whether mathematics could supply any method of determining political probabilities?" D'Alembert, remembering how his Majesty's military skill had triumphed over "all Europe leagued against him," replied "that he knew of no method for that object, but that if one existed it had just been rendered useless by the hero who had asked him that question."[1]

After several months spent in the sunshine of Royal favour at Sans Souci he returned once more to Paris, and resumed his visits to the convent of Saint Joseph. During one of these the rupture which had long been imminent between himself

[1] 'Nouvelle Biographie Universelle,' Firmin Didot Frères. Paris. 1858.

and Madame du Deffand at length took place. This was occasioned, as our readers will remember, by the Marquise discovering that Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse had lately become accustomed to hold in her apartments a secret reception of her friends in the early morning hours. In the old lady's eyes such conduct on the part of her companion, who had now shared her house for years, amounted to nothing less than treason. The offence was rendered all the more unpardonable by the fact that d'Alembert was the ringleader of this company of clandestine visitors, consisting, among others, of Turgot, the Chevalier de Chastellux, and Marmontel, who were all members of her own circle.

Already sufficiently prejudiced against the unfortunate Julie for having monopolised the affection of d'Alembert, she was beside herself with rage upon making this discovery, which filled her cup of passionate resentment to the brim. Acting on the impulse of the moment, she refused ever to see her hated rival again, and immediately bade d'Alembert choose between that young lady and herself. Needless to say that in spite of the ties of friendship which had long bound him to the Marquise, d'Alembert decided in favour of Julie, who now quitted the convent of Saint Joseph and set up house in the Rue Saint Dominic.

The subsequent story of this great philosopher's unrequited love for the woman to whom hence-

forward he devoted his whole life cannot be dealt with here. Suffice it to say that his tireless devotion to her assumed an element of tragedy when on her death it became his painful duty to examine her papers, and among them discovered the secret of her passion for M. de Mora, which had continued during many of the years he himself had been attached to her. Fortunate, indeed, was it that he never learned the existence of her other and later love for the Comte de Guibert, whose connection with Madame Necker will be described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

Closely connected with Diderot and the other encyclopædists of Madame Necker's salon was Frédéric Melchior Grimm, who will be remembered as the author of the 'Correspondance Littéraire' and as the favourite of the Empress Catherine II. of Russia.

Grimm was of German origin, being born at Ratisbon in 1723. After concluding his education with some distinction at Leipsic, he went to Paris as tutor to the children of the Comte de Schomberg. Subsequently for a short time he entered the service of the Prince of Saxe Coburg, and then became secretary to the celebrated Comte de Friesen, a patron of art and letters and a nephew of the Maréchal de Saxe.

While he was thus moving about the world, sometimes employed by one nobleman and then by another, he came in touch with Rousseau, who, being struck by his superior intelligence and ability, did his best to assist him in his career by introducing him to literary men of standing. The kindly interest which Jean Jacques then

evinced in his affairs was the beginning of a friendship between them which would probably have lasted for a number of years had not Grimm's intimacy with Madame d'Épinay[1] soon brought it to an untimely ending. Rousseau, who had long been attached to that lady, was naturally mortified to find himself suddenly supplanted in her affections by a young man to whom he had been of considerable service. He at once revenged himself by breaking off all further relations with him.

Grimm's connection with one of the most interesting and attractive women of the eighteenth century had originated under somewhat romantic circumstances. At the time of the death of her sister-in-law, Madame Tully de Bellegarde, Madame d'Épinay had burned all the papers belonging to her deceased relative. She did so in accordance with the last wishes of Madame Tully, who was anxious that neither her love letters nor any other compromising documents should survive her. When her family discovered what Madame d'Épinay had done, their indignation became unbounded, for they at once assumed that she had destroyed her sister-in-law's papers, knowing that by their loss a considerable sum of money would revert to herself. Now Grimm, contrary to the opinion of nearly all her other acquaintances, was always firmly convinced

[1] Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles ; b. 1725, d. 1781. She was the daughter of a Brigadier d'Infanterie, and wife of M. de Lalive d'Épinay, the Fermier-Général.

of her innocence. One night, at a supper-party, on hearing her name lightly used by some one present, he at once called out the offender and fought a duel with him in defence of her honour. Shortly after this incident the papers which had been the cause of so much scandal came to light, and Madame d'Épinay's character was completely cleared. Nevertheless, she did not forget the gallant rôle that Grimm had played in the affair, and rewarded his devotion by many years of the warmest friendship.

It seems probable that it was in this lady's salon that Grimm first met Madame Necker, who was occasionally to be seen there. But it was not until some time after his introduction to her that he became a regular member of her circle. His platonic affection for Madame d'Épinay precluded him at that time from forming ties of friendship with any other woman, no matter what claims she might have upon his notice. Gradually, however, as he got to know Madame Necker better, he became attracted by the charms of her mind and person, and at last no longer hesitated to respond to the invitations she sent him. As time went on he often attended her Fridays, and was more than once heard to regret that the distance between his house and hers prevented him from seeing her as often as he could wish.

During his travels through Holland and the German States, or his lengthy visits to the

Russian Court, as the guest of his friend the Empress, he used to keep Madame Necker constantly informed of the various incidents of his life in foreign lands, and of his somewhat exacting intercourse with his Imperial benefactress. To these letters she would reply by sending him descriptions of events going on in Paris, and news of literary men and matters in which his interests were wholly centred.

It was essentially in his capacity of letter-writer that Grimm acquired so much celebrity in the literary world of those days. Besides his extensive correspondence with many other distinguished men and women, he exchanged letters with no less than six ruling European princes, including the Kings of Sweden and Poland and the Empress Catherine of Russia.

But in addition to the popularity of his letters, which were often read aloud in Parisian salons to an admiring circle, Grimm had made his mark by an opuscule called 'The little Prophet of Boehmischbroda.' As an enthusiastic admirer of Italian opera he had once belonged to a group of amateurs known as "les quatre coins de la reine," who did much to encourage performances of Italian music in France.

In his 'Little Prophet of Boehmischbroda' he pleaded the cause of the latter with so much eloquence and originality that he was highly complimented by many eminent writers, includ-

ing Voltaire, who after reading it exclaimed, "How comes this Bohemian to have more wit than us?" A remark of this kind, coming from so illustrious a critic, would alone have sufficed to establish his reputation as a promising author, had not the success of his 'Correspondance Littéraire,' published many years afterwards, entirely eclipsed that of all his earlier productions.

Another prominent member of Madame Necker's circle, who, like Grimm, had identified himself with the encyclopædist faction, was Saint Lambert the poet.

A native of Nancy, Jean François de Saint Lambert was born in 1716. Educated by the Jesuits of Pont à Mousson, he afterwards entered the army, and subsequently became captain of the Guards of Lorraine at the Court of King Stanislas Leczinski[1] at Lunéville. Soon after he arrived there in 1747 he became an object of interest to the beautiful Marquise du Châtelet,[2] who soon fell deeply in love with him. His striking appearance and air of aristocratic distinction, though unaccompanied by grace or ease of manner, were well calculated to appeal to a woman of her temperament. Madame du Châtelet, who was about ten

[1] Stanislas Leczinski, King of Poland, had abdicated in 1736, and from that time until his death in 1766 resided at Nancy and Lunéville.

[2] Gabrielle Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, Marquise du Châtelet, daughter of the Baron de Breteuil, "Introducteur des ambassadeurs"; b. 1706, d. 1749.

years his senior, had won celebrity both from her literary achievements and from a number of notorious love-affairs, in which her name had been coupled with those of various distinguished men of the day. For some time before she met Saint Lambert she had been conducting an amorous intrigue with Voltaire at her husband's château at Cirey, and it was from there that she and her lover used to make frequent expeditions to the Court of Lunéville, where they were always warmly received by King Stanislas. In this way she was brought into contact with Saint Lambert, and soon embarked upon what was destined to be the last love-affair of her life. For when, about two years later, it resulted in a daughter being born to her, she survived but a few days the birth of her child.

Such was the degraded state of morality in those days that this episode in the poet's life appears to have given him a certain interesting distinction in the eyes of his Parisian acquaintances which made him a much favoured member of society. This popularity was enhanced by the favour of Voltaire, who had not only entirely forgiven Saint Lambert for having supplanted him in the affections of Madame du Châtelet, but had been of considerable service to him since her death.

At the conclusion of the campaigns in which he had taken part in 1756 and 1757, Saint Lambert left the Service, settled in Paris, and proceeded to fit himself for a literary career. As a staunch

supporter of the encyclopædists he began to frequent the salons of the Baron d'Holbach and Madame Geoffrin, and afterwards became one of the earliest habitués of that of Madame Necker. His acquaintance with the latter began at the time of the publication of 'Le Matin' and 'Le Soir,' two of his best known poems, which were afterwards followed by his successful 'Saisons.'

Accustomed from the first to take a leading part in the discussions which were held there, Saint Lambert continued to be one of the principal debaters in Madame Necker's salon until almost the eve of the Revolution. His attachment to Madame d'Houdetot, with whom we shall meet again later, formed a yet closer link between himself and Madame Necker, who numbered that delightful woman among her most valued friends.

A personality of more predominating influence at Madame Necker's receptions was that of the Abbé Raynal, whose works had placed him in the forefront of contemporary historians. Guillaume Thomas François Raynal[1] had spent many of the earlier years of his life with the Jesuits of Pezenas. Taking holy orders at the age of four-and-twenty, he was nominated later a priest of the Church of Saint Sulpice in Paris. His resources being then at a low ebb, he began to try and increase them by negotiating ecclesiastical preferments and the holy offices of the Church to his own profit. These dis-

[1] 1713-1796.

creditable proceedings were soon discovered, however, and he was compelled to resign his Ministry. Desiring to seek celebrity in the world of fashion, he then assiduously began to cultivate the acquaintance of influential men of letters, and with their assistance eventually obtained a post on the editorial staff of the 'Mercure de France.' During the next ten years of his life he devoted himself to political and historical studies, and wrote extensively upon questions dealing with popular emancipation. The opinions to which he thus gave expression were supported by the philosophers with whom he chiefly consorted in the principal literary salons. His first appearance at the Hôtel Leblanc appears to have coincided with that of his famous 'Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes,'[1] many of the best chapters of which are said to have been contributed by Diderot, Thomas, Guibert, Naigeon,[2] and the Baron d'Holbach. Besides a quantity of facts and information of immense interest to the world of letters of those days, it contains endless digressions and scathing criticisms upon subjects of even greater importance, such as the Constitution, the Clergy, and the Church. In the first edition the author, fearing the penalties to

[1] The first edition of this work appeared in 1770, and the second in 1780.

[2] Jacques André Naigeon, draughtsman, sculptor, and painter, and during the later years of his life the author of various works dealing with philosophical subjects; b. 1738, d. 1810.

which he knew a work of that kind would make him liable, had discreetly remained anonymous. But in the second he boldly added his name and portrait, with the result that his book was immediately confiscated by the King's orders, and he himself, in order to avoid imprisonment, was obliged to fly the country. He took refuge in Prussia, where he became the protégé of Prince Henry, and was considered by many people a champion of liberty and constitutional reform. At last, through the influence of powerful friends, he was permitted to return to France in 1787. Since, however, the capital was still closed to him, he lived for some years at Toulon, and only re-entered Paris after the beginning of the Revolution.

Though not, strictly speaking, a member of her literary circle, the Comte de Guibert, whose name has been mentioned above in connection with the love-affairs of Julie de l'Espinasse, was evidently something of a "persona grata" to Madame Necker, for we meet with a long and enthusiastic description of him in her 'Mélanges.'

Jacques Antoine Hippolyte de Guibert[1] was the son of Charles, Comte de Guibert, a distinguished soldier and for some time Governor of the Invalides. Brought up in a military atmosphere, which made a deep impression upon his childish mind, he joined the army as soon as he was old enough to do so. After the battle of Bergen he was nominated aide-

[1] 1743-1790.

de-camp to his father, whom he afterwards accompanied on many of the campaigns of the Seven Years' War. Giving a brilliant account of himself in all of these, he had carefully studied the tactics of the contending armies with the intention of writing a book on the subject after his return to France. His observations were afterwards embodied in his famous 'Essai général de Tactique,' which not only evoked the highest praise from the greatest tacticians of the day, including King Frederic of Prussia, but, what was probably even more gratifying to Guibert, was read with avidity by ladies of fashion and "had its place on every tea-table and in every boudoir."

The Count was at that time but four-and-twenty years of age. In addition to his great intellectual gifts he possessed considerable personal attractions, which fully account for the extraordinary adulation he received from his women acquaintances. To handsome, regular features, "deep-set eyes," and curling hair, he united an "easy," graceful "carriage, and the free and natural laugh of youth." His face "conveyed an impression of force and energy," and this was yet further accentuated by the manner in which he "carried his head very erect upon a powerful neck."

Madame Necker has recorded in the following words her impressions of this irresistible young man, whom, as a tribute to his literary as well as military

fame, she used to call "Turenne, Bossuet, and Corneille all in one."

"M. de Guibert," she writes, "received at his birth . . . all the advantages of memory, all the endowments of intellect, vitality, energy, and imagination, in one word all the indications of superior talents; more happily gifted than the most fortunate men of his class, one admired in him marvellous and quite individual powers such as no man had ever possessed before; the faculty, for instance, of doubling the ordinary value of time by being as learned at twenty as other people are at forty."

Referring to his 'Essai général de Tactique,' which she had read with interest, she goes on to say, ". . . at the age of twenty-four he produced a work which amazed the oldest and most able generals. He wrote a preface for it in which vigorous ideas, lofty sentiments, and descriptive charm seemed to realise or even to surpass all the hopes of society and of M. de Guibert's fortunate relations. Who has ever entered on a career of distinction with so much brilliance, strength, and maturity? The preface of 'La Tactique' was read by every woman, and the work itself studied in every army and in all Europe; in this way the author became an object of admiration to both sexes; and at four-and-twenty added fresh lustre to his country's honour."

About 1772, when his book was at the height of its popularity, Guibert made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse. Julie had then but recently said good-bye to her former lover, M. de Mora, son of the Spanish Ambassador, whose family, disapproving of his connection with her, had recalled him to Spain. In despair at his departure she began to turn for consolation to the brilliant Guibert, by whom she had always felt attracted, even though she had hitherto but rarely seen him. From this time forward her liking for him steadily increased, until at no distant date she found herself hopelessly in love with him. In the meantime Guibert, whose thoughts were entirely centred upon his advancement, felt but little inclination to indulge in a passion that might restrict it. Nevertheless, for a while he undoubtedly returned her affection, and it was only at his marriage that he finally ceased to occupy the position of her lover.

In order to restore the fortunes of his family, which had at that time become seriously compromised, he contracted, in 1775, an alliance with Mademoiselle de Courcelles, "a young girl of seventeen, pretty, intelligent, rich, and well-born." The marriage, though one of convention, proved extremely happy, for Guibert soon learned to love and admire the charming young person who he sometimes referred to as "his friendliest, most candid and adorable wife."

Shortly before his marriage he had once more

achieved immense success in society as the author of a tragedy called 'Le Connétable de Bourbon.'

In accordance with a custom that prevailed in all the literary salons, including, of course, that of Madame Necker, Guibert, like other talented writers, was often asked to read or recite passages from his dramatic works, among which 'Le Connétable de Bourbon' was for a season the most popular. When thus engaged, his marvellous eloquence, seconded, we are told, by an exquisitely modulated voice, "stirred the hearts of his listeners even before their minds succumbed to words which flowed forth like a deep sounding stream." By sheer force of expression and by the heat and fire with which he declaimed, Guibert completely carried away his audience; and Madame Necker, who had often heard him do so, used to say that he read "a whole play better than the best company of actors could do it, and that women were borne dead or dying from her performance." [1] But to his wonderful powers of eloquence and expression alone must be ascribed the immense success of his 'Connétable de Bourbon.' For when, by command of Marie Antoinette, it was performed in the Royal Theatre at Versailles in 1775, it proved a complete failure.

Many of his other productions, for want of their author's rhetorical genius to back them, unfortunately shared the same fate. "As long," observes

[1] Marquis de Ségur, 'Julie de l'Espinasse.'

Madame Necker, "as people listened to Guibert declaiming his works they enthusiastically admired him, but as soon as he stopped reading and the emotions of his hearers were no longer stirred and carried away in spite of themselves, they overwhelmed him with criticisms."[1]

With a career bearing some resemblance to that of Guibert, the Chevalier, or, as he was afterwards called, the Marquis de Chastellux constantly attended réunions at the Hôtel Leblanc, the learned atmosphere of which his ready wit and lively humour did much to enliven.

François Jean de Chastellux,[2] traveller, soldier, and littérateur, was nearing the middle term of life when he made the acquaintance of the Neckers. As a young man he had won distinction in the army, in which he attained the rank of colonel at the early age of twenty, and subsequently, like Guibert, had taken part in several campaigns in Germany during the Seven Years' War. Possessing in abundance every qualification necessary for social success, the Chevalier's particular gift for repartee and picturesque expression justified his name as the most charming of conversationalists. "In more serious moments," says M. de Ségur, "his views were often original, 'while streaks of illumination' often flashed across his talk like lightning through a bank of cloud." But the mania for unmeasured and incessant puns marred his undoubted wit, and

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker.

[2] 1734-1788.

his dissertations too often suffered from obscurity of expression."

Julie de l'Espinasse, of whom he was always one of the "most attentive friends," but in whom he never appears to have inspired more than a feeling of gratitude for his friendship, considered that he "attached too much importance to trifles, 'the world's stupidities,' and a needless admiration 'for Court, the Princes, their rising, retiring, and *vegetating!*'"[1] But apart from these somewhat irritating characteristics, the Chevalier "was endowed with the most solid and agreeable qualities, which made him sought after both at Court and in the city."

Enjoying as he did a fair share of appreciation in the salons, he was again fortunate enough to be able to attain to a certain degree of literary distinction. Since his retirement from the army he had composed a few graceful little poems, two or three light comedies intended for "amateur performance," and had contributed articles on a variety of subjects to the 'Mercure de France.' In 1772 he established his reputation by a book called 'De la Félicité Publique, ou considérations sur le sort des hommes dans les différentes époques de l'histoire.' Thanks to the merits of this work, and also to the influence of Julie de l'Espinasse, the Chevalier was elected a member of the Academy some three years later, and having obtained this honour he may be said to have reached the summit of his ambitions.

[1] Marquis de Ségur, 'Julie de l'Espinasse.'

Another interesting and personally more attractive friend of Madame Necker's was the virtuous and high-principled Suard,[1] author of the famous 'Éloge de Montesquieu.' The son of the secretary of the University of Besançon, he had barely reached the age of seventeen when he was involved in an affair of honour that had for him the most unfortunate consequences. While acting as second in a duel between one of his friends and a military officer, he was arrested and "imprisoned for a year in the fortress of St Margaret in Provence." When his sentence expired he returned to Besançon, and at once applied himself to the study of French and English literature. Not long afterwards he went to Paris, was there befriended by Marmontel, La Harpe, and one or two members of the foreign colony, such as Horace Walpole and David Hume, and in course of time became known as the editor of such publications as the 'Journal Étranger,' the 'Gazette de France,' and the 'Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe.'

Success in his case, however, had only been attained after many struggles with poverty and misfortune. Too proud and "unworldly" to adopt the methods of advancement employed by those who solicited the support of influential patrons, Suard was "one of those men who live from hand to mouth, take no thought for to-morrow, and trust the day's bread to fortune."[2] "Tall and finely

[1] Jean Baptiste Antoine Suard; b. 1733, d. 1817.

[2] Marquis de Ségur, 'Julie de l'Espinasse.'

built, and of a countenance at once noble and thoughtful, his natural distinction rose superior to the airs and graces characteristic of most literary men of the day. He fascinated by an irresistible charm of speech at once warm and deliberate, a conversation now light and now serious, ever varied and never pedantic. His wit was fine and his discrimination sure, while his kindly and sensible nature made him a most lovable companion."[1] With so many admirable qualities as these we can well understand that Suard soon became a favourite with Madame Necker, who was also greatly attached to his talented young wife. Madame Suard belonged to the family of Panckoucke, and was a sister of Charles Joseph Panckoucke the printer. On her marriage in 1775 she had possessed "no other portion than her intellect and beauty," but was yet of some service to her husband by bringing him in touch with the encyclopædists, who were all well-known to her brother. Of a somewhat retiring disposition, her gentleness and amiability were ever greatly appreciated by her husband's numerous friends, amongst the principal of whom were M. and Madame Necker.

From time to time she used to spend some weeks at the Château of Ferney with Voltaire, who had long been on familiar terms with her family, and was a particular friend of her own. She is said to have entertained a cult for the genius of the great

[1] Marquis de Ségur, 'Julie de l'Espinasse.'

philosopher, whose works she knew almost by heart. Voltaire, who was well aware that she could quote passages from almost any of his plays without the least difficulty, once paid a signal tribute to this accomplishment. One day Panckoucke asked him whether he realised "that if all the editions of his works were lost he would still find one in Madame Suard's memory?" "Yes," answered Voltaire, "and corrected too!"[1]

Our review of Madame Necker's literary friends would be incomplete without some mention of the light-hearted little cleric who for a few years almost occupied the position of court jester in her salon. This was the celebrated Abbé Galiani, whose name we find so often mentioned in the mémoires of the time.

Ferdinand Galiani was of Neapolitan extraction, being born at Chieti in 1728. Brought up by an uncle, who was chaplain to the King of Naples, he was educated at a convent of Célestins, renowned in those days as a seat of learning. His education completed, he mainly confined his attention to economical questions, upon which he soon became an authority. In 1759 he obtained a post in the Royal household, and a few months later was appointed Secretary to the Neapolitan Embassy in Paris.

Being of minute size and rather grotesque appearance, his presentation to Louis Quinze, a year later, gave rise to much amusement among the ever critical courtiers of Versailles. But far from being in

[1] Nouvelle Biographie Universelle.

the least abashed by the impression he had created, the worthy little Abbé made light of it by saying to the King: "Sire, you see now only a specimen of a secretary; the secretary comes later!"[1] This little speech both pleased the King and still further increased the merriment of the Court, and through it his reputation as a wit was made. Yet in spite of so successful a *début* in his diplomatic career, he took such a violent dislike to his new surroundings that he soon begged his Government to allow him to return to his native land. Fortunately for Parisian society, however, his request was not granted, and he remained in France. With his introduction to the life of the salons, where he soon made several friends among the encyclopædists and philosophers, he saw that he had underrated the advantages of life in the French capital. Marmontel, who knew him intimately, gives us the following account of him in his 'Mémoires': "The Abbé Galiani was in appearance the prettiest little harlequin that Italy ever produced; but on the shoulders of that harlequin was the head of Machiavelli. Seeing everything from a humorous standpoint, there was nothing either in politics or ethics about which he had not some good story to tell, and these anecdotes, which were always to the point, were seasoned with unexpected and ingenious allusions. In addition, picture to yourself the naïve gaiety with which he related and gesticu-

[1] Nouvelle Biographie Universelle.

lated, and imagine the entertainment which the contrast between the extreme sense of the narrator's story and his air of jocularity afforded us. I do not exaggerate when I say that one forgot everything in listening to him, sometimes for hours on end." One of the first houses he frequented in Paris was that of Madame Geoffrin, who always indulgently permitted him to give vent to his irrepressible high spirits in a way which would scarcely have been tolerated elsewhere.

Some years later, when Madame Necker began to form her circle, the Abbé became one of the earliest of her literary friends, and one upon whose arguments she used sometimes to rely when combating the atheistic views of Raynal, Diderot, or d'Alembert. For his part, Galiani was always glad to find himself in her salon, which he used to say was one of the few places where he could obtain a fair hearing, and where his opinions on religious and economical questions were listened to with respect. He also delighted to twit his excellent hostess upon her air of irreproachable virtue, though he was always careful to do so in a way which could not possibly hurt her feelings.

When in 1769, "at the desire of the Duc de Choiseul, whom he had somehow offended, Galiani was recalled by his Government to Naples," he took leave of his numerous friends in Paris with feelings of the keenest regret. After his return to Italy he found himself almost entirely deprived of

the intellectual advantages he had enjoyed in France, and used often to bewail the assemblies of Mesdames Geoffrin and Necker, and even to count those years he had spent in the "Café de l'Europe" as "the only ones in which he had lived a real life!"[1]

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

CHAPTER VII.

Since we have now acquainted ourselves with a few of Madame Necker's literary friends, let us endeavour to form some idea of her salon itself, that is to say, in so far as it concerns her life and interests at the time of her residence at the Hôtel Leblanc.

As regards the topics she discussed with the members of her circle, these were at first mainly of a literary or philosophical nature; but later, after her husband's appointment to the Treasury, they became political as well.

Conversation at her Fridays, though excellent, was inclined to be a "little constrained, because in her presence so many subjects could not be touched upon." She suffered, in particular, "from liberty of religious opinions," and in expressing their views on that question her guests were compelled to observe the greatest discretion. "But we talked pleasantly," says Morellet, "about literature, upon which she spoke herself extremely well."[1] Concerning this, or, indeed, any other subject in which she was

[1] Mémoires de Morellet.

especially interested, Madame Necker was accustomed to air her ideas with a candour that did not fail to impress her hearers, who sometimes suspected, however, that her conclusions were derived less from her own personal experience than from the abstruse volumes she had consulted beforehand. The discussions to which she gave the lead were too often, indeed, prepared in advance; and in proof of this curious habit we find the following anecdote quoted in the Mémoires of Madame de Genlis:—

One evening Madame Necker had invited a few friends to dinner. The first to arrive was the Chevalier de Chastellux, who, being somewhat in advance of the appointed hour, was left for a few moments alone in the salon before the appearance of his hostess and her other guests. While waiting he began to pace up and down the room, and in doing so noticed a little white volume lying beneath Madame Necker's chair. Thinking that it was merely some learned work that she had been studying, he picked it up. On opening it he found the pages closely inscribed in her handwriting, and the next moment his eyes fell on the following words: "I shall talk to the Chevalier de Chastellux about 'La Félicité Publique' and 'Agathe' [two of his latest works]; to Madame d'Angeviller about love; and I shall promote a literary discussion between M. de Marmontel and M. de Guibert." The Chevalier, who was as much surprised as amused

by the discovery he had made, at once realised that he was reading Madame Necker's carefully prepared notes for the various topics of conversation she intended to discuss with her guests at dinner. His conjecture proved to be correct, for scarcely had he replaced the little volume in its original position when a footman entered, saying that he had been sent by his mistress to look for her "tablets." Perceiving the object he was seeking beneath Madame Necker's chair, he took it up and withdrew. Later in the evening the Chevalier had the supreme satisfaction of hearing his hostess bring forward, one by one, the very points he had seen noted down in the little volume he had surreptitiously opened.

On another occasion Necker met with something of the same experience when, on coming across his wife's memorandum-book in some unexpected corner, he found, among other reminders, the following: "Remember to congratulate M. Thomas again more warmly upon his 'Song of France' in his poem 'Peter the Great.'"

This method of arranging her conversation beforehand, though employed at the cost of so much freshness and originality, was actuated by a motive in itself praiseworthy. From the moment she founded her "bureau d'esprit" Madame Necker's one desire was to make herself as agreeable to her guests as possible, and for this reason took pains to

say to each one of them whatever she thought would please him most.

While she would throw herself whole-heartedly into the debates in which they indulged, her husband, sitting a little apart and apparently absorbed in his own reflections, generally adopted an attitude of cold and dignified reserve. Only occasionally did he take any part in the proceedings, and then it was usually in order to make some observation tinged with delicate irony or to criticise the opinions "of the philosophers of whom he considered his wife was far too much enamoured." Madame Necker "on her side used openly to banter him about his airs of awkwardness" and perpetual silence, but always in a way that was intended to show him off to the best advantage.[1]

Although he had read a good deal in the days of his youth, Necker had since been compelled, owing to the exigencies of his business career, largely to abandon his literary tastes, and in order, so it was thought, not to betray his ignorance of the questions discussed, preferred to say little or nothing unless his views were expressly called for. But in spite of his taciturnity he always received his wife's friends with civility, though seldom with that kind of "cordiality which gives to politeness an appearance of friendship."

Apart from the interchange of ideas and opinions

[1] Mémoires de Morellet; Mémoires de Marmontel.

that took place in the salon of the Hôtel Leblanc, the actual manner in which the conversation was conducted was in itself a matter of the utmost interest to Madame Necker and her friends. For in those days conversation was an accomplishment practised and acquired with somewhat the same patience and care as we might now give to the study of art or music. Its principal characteristics consisted not only in graceful, picturesque descriptions, interspersed with well-turned phrases and clever anecdotes, but in the faculty, on the part of those who took part in it, always to be able to say the right thing at the right moment, spontaneously and without the least apparent effort.[1] Madame Necker, who had not been brought up in an atmosphere suitable to its development, was never an adept at this art, which was so essential and important a feature of social intercourse in those days, and one in which the majority of her friends were extremely well versed. She was probably fully aware of her own limitations in this direction, and her consciousness of them made her value all the higher the advantages of Parisian society, which was then considered the most cultivated and refined in Europe. From the numerous letters she continued to write to old friends at Geneva and Lausanne — letters that have sometimes been thought to resemble pages out of a book, so carefully are they phrased and worded—we learn that

[1] MM. de Goncourt, 'La femme au dix-huitième siècle.'

she was becoming ever more entranced by the charm of Parisian life, which made her prefer the French capital to any other place she had yet lived in. When, before her marriage, she had first become acquainted with French manners and customs, which she had heard so often vaunted in her native land, there had been much, in the social life of the great city, of which she had strongly disapproved. Now, however, as she was beginning to take her place among the great "salonières" of the day, she was fast realising that for satisfying her literary inclinations and for making new friends Paris offered opportunities impossible to find elsewhere. There could have been, indeed, during these years when she saw herself surrounded by everything which made life worth living, but one regret in her mind, and that was that she could not now put into effect a desire she had long cherished to "place herself in a favourable light with authors" by writing a book on her own account. Soon after her marriage she had sometimes attempted to use her pen, but Necker, who particularly disapproved of such an occupation for any woman, let alone his wife, had explained to her with much delicacy and tact that if she persevered in it he would end by considering himself of little importance to one who seemed to place so high a value upon her literary achievements. After this reproof she had dutifully renounced her project, and for the future had tried to content herself with

extensive correspondence, or, when her husband was deep in his work, with reflections and ideas hastily jotted down in a notebook or upon a stray sheet of paper. But whenever he entered the room she would immediately stop writing and devote her whole attention to him during the brief moments of relaxation which his exacting career permitted him to spend with her.

Both to Madame Necker and her literary friends, many of whom were either recipients of Academical honours or candidates for those much-coveted distinctions, the affairs of the Academy were a constant and never-ending source of interest. The prizes awarded to authors, poets, historians, and orators, and the addresses they delivered on the day of their reception, were matters of supreme importance to every rising author, to whom a chair at the great institution was looked upon as the final seal to a successful career.

Gradually, as her salon became more firmly established, it was believed by those who did not yet enjoy the privilege of being invited to it that Madame Necker, like other women of her position in society, would sometimes consent to use her influence with Academicians in favour of some struggling and deserving writer. There may not have been much truth in this supposition, but none the less it was not unusual for obscure and impecunious men of letters, who did not know her personally, to write and beg her to further their

interests. It was no doubt in order to try to do so that she used often to read aloud to an attentive though critical audience certain passages from their little-known works which she hoped might meet with approval. This was a proceeding sometimes apt to cause her embarrassment, for in the event of her hearers being unable to appreciate the subject she had selected, her efforts would be listened to with undisguised impatience. Such, indeed, was the reception accorded to the now classic 'Paul et Virginie,' which is traditionally believed to have been read for the first time in her salon.[1]

Since the fame of Madame Necker's assemblies was partly derived from incidents of this kind, we venture to cite two others which are connected with men of far greater distinction than the author of 'Paul et Virginie,' and which throw some light upon the extraordinary interest that was felt in fashionable society regarding everything that concerned the most celebrated writers of the time.

In the summer of 1766 Rousseau became involved in a quarrel with Hume. The first announcement of this news was made at a supper-party given by the Neckers in July of that year by one of their guests who had brought with him a letter, lately received by the Baron d'Holbach from Hume, containing a full account of this regrettable affair, which was as much the result of Jean Jacques'

[1] Sainte Beuve, 'Portraits Littéraires,' vol. i.

natural eccentricity as his unfortunate inclination to suspect all men, even his most devoted friends, of mean and unfair designs against himself.[1]

To understand clearly how the quarrel had originated, our readers must be reminded of certain facts connected with that period of Rousseau's life. It will be remembered that after the publication of 'Émile' he had had to leave Montmorency, where he had lived for some time in a small house placed at his disposal by M. and Madame de Luxembourg, and had taken refuge in Switzerland, first at Yverdun and then at Môtiers-Travers. That was in 1762. Three years later he went to England, and on his arrival there was shown much kindness and hospitality by Hume, who introduced him to his friends, secured him a pleasant and comfortable residence in the country, and even went so far as to try and obtain a pension for him from King George III.

At first Jean Jacques had professed the deepest gratitude for all that Hume had done for him, but little by little, as he began to reflect and ponder in the seclusion of his new home at Wootton, he became convinced that so much kindness could not have been entirely disinterested; then that Hume's desire to befriend him in exile had probably been dictated by unworthy motives; and finally, that he "had only brought him over to England and procured him what appeared to be a safe retreat in order to disgrace him the more in the eyes of

[1] Sainte Beuve, 'Nouveaux Lundis,' vol. iv.

society." From the moment that these entirely groundless suspicions entered Rousseau's mind, Hume appeared to him the most odious and despicable of men. Obsessed with this idea, he proceeded to send him a letter filled with insults and accusations which, as he knew them to be groundless, naturally caused Hume a good deal of irritation and annoyance. Without pausing to consider the consequences of such an act, the latter immediately wrote and complained to the Baron d'Holbach of the treatment he had received from Rousseau, adding, that in self-defence he desired all the circumstances of the case to be communicated "à toute la société philosophique." D'Holbach hastened to comply with these injunctions, with the result that one of his friends openly announced the details of the quarrel at the Neckers' supper-party. Until that moment every one had been picturing "Hume and Jean Jacques clasped in each others' arms, shedding tears of gratitude . . . and enjoying mutual happiness," so that the totally unexpected news of the rupture that had taken place between them descended upon the assembled company like a thunder-clap. Surprise became stupefaction when it was elicited that Hume's letter to d'Holbach had begun with the words: "Mon cher baron, Jean Jacques est un scélérat," and that Rousseau had called Hume "un traître!" "These two words, traître and scélérat," states one historian, "not then employed

with so much liberality as they have been since, sounded at that supper and the same night in part of the capital like two strokes of the tocsin."[1]

The third and perhaps the most important of these historical incidents associated with Madame Necker's salon, and one with which she herself was closely identified, was the project of erecting in France a statue to Voltaire.

As we have mentioned in an earlier chapter, Madame Necker had sometimes visited this great man at his château at Ferney, during the earlier years of her life before her marriage. She had always felt a great personal admiration for him, and since her departure from Switzerland had continued to keep up her connection with him by writing him long letters, which he had always answered in a tone of great friendliness. Seeing, then, what their relations had been, it was but natural that the idea of giving some expression to the esteem that was felt for the great philosopher in French literary circles should emanate from Madame Necker.

The subject was first broached, says Grimm, at a meeting of "seventeen venerable philosophers," in the salon of the Hôtel Leblanc on the 17th of April, 1770. Among those present on this occasion, in addition to himself, were Diderot, Suard, the Chevalier de Chastellux, Marmontel, Thomas, Raynal, Morellet, and d'Alembert, who,

[1] Sainte Beuve, 'Nouveaux Lundis.'

"after they had all dined copiously and discussed a number of different things at random, unanimously resolved to erect a statue in Voltaire's honour." No sooner had the project been formed under the presiding genius of Madame Necker, than it was eagerly discussed and criticised among her rivals. By some of these—namely, Madame Geoffrin, Madame d'Angeviller, and the Baron d'Holbach—it was supported with enthusiasm, but by others it met with scant approval, partly, it appears, because it was not customary to raise statues to living celebrities, and partly because as yet none had been erected either to Corneille or Racine. Madame Necker was not to be put off by objections of this kind, however, and as she had made up her mind to carry out her scheme, now wrote and asked Voltaire to give his consent to it. Towards the end of May she received the most promising reply. Voltaire informed her that at first he had thought the idea of putting up a statue to a man of his age (he was then seventy-six) was intended merely as a "bonne plaisanterie," but that on realising that the matter was a serious one, he wished to protest that surely never before had any one been modelled in the state that he was in.

At that time Voltaire was only just recovering from a serious illness which had reduced him to a condition of excessive emaciation, and, according to his own account of himself, his eyes had sunk

deep into his head, his cheeks looked like "old parchment stretched over bones that held on to nothing," and the few teeth that he possessed before his illness had now fallen out.[1] Such being the sorry case in which he found himself, he felt, with reason, that he was in no fit state to do justice to the art of M. Pigalle,[2] who had been commissioned to model him. Perceiving from her letters, however, that Madame Necker had set her heart on seeing the fulfilment of her wishes, he eventually decided to waive these objections and allow her to have her own way in the matter.

Pigalle was accordingly despatched to Ferney early in June, and at once set to work upon his arduous undertaking. Shortly afterwards Voltaire wrote to tell Madame Necker how the statue was progressing, and mentioned an amusing anecdote concerning some villagers, who had concluded from the implements used by the sculptor that he fully intended to dissect their unfortunate Patriarch! It was at this stage of the work that Madame Necker became much disturbed in mind on hearing that Pigalle desired to model an absolutely nude figure of the old man. For apart from its unsuitability, owing to Voltaire's advanced age and

[1] 'Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire,' vol. xlvii. ; Correspondance 15 ; letter 7890.

[2] Jean Baptiste Pigalle ; b. 1714, d. 1786. He was a pupil of Robert Le Lorrain and Jean Baptiste Lemoyne. His most celebrated work is a monument to the Maréchal de Saxe in the Church of St Thomas at Strasburg.

physical condition, such a conception was in her opinion, if not absolutely indecent, at any rate most indelicate![1]

By the third week in July, for better or worse, the sculptor's task was completed, and the first and most difficult part of Madame Necker's scheme accomplished. She now received a reward for her pains in a gracefully expressed letter from Voltaire, in which he assured her that what she had been the means of bringing about had consoled him for fifty years of literary sorrows and disappointments.

When finally erected in Paris, some six years afterwards, Pigalle's statue, while in some quarters pronounced a masterpiece, was in others considered incorrect and worthless. But though so little flattering to the original, it is probably a faithful representation of the great philosopher as he appeared during the declining years of his life, and is thus, in addition to its artistic merits, an object of interest to posterity.

Madame Necker had hitherto, as we have seen, been accustomed to receive her literary friends once only in the week, although certain of them, such as Thomas, Marmontel, or Buffon, were always welcome to come and see her on any other day they chose to do so. As the number of her acquaintances increased, however, she became obliged to institute a second reception day on Tuesdays, and on that day she took care to

[1] Sainte Beuve, 'Causeries du Lundi,' vol. iv.

provide for her company other and lighter forms of entertainment than were customary at her Fridays.

On Tuesdays, we are told, dinner, which at the Hôtel Leblanc was arranged on a scale of great profusion, was served at four o'clock in the afternoon. When this was ended, the Neckers and their guests would repair to the salon and pass the rest of the evening listening to music, recitations, or "causeries dramatiques." These last were often provided by the celebrated actress, Mademoiselle Clairon,[1] who at Madame Necker's request would perform a selection from some of the great rôles with which she had once delighted many a theatre audience. Afterwards music would be provided in the shape of clavecin pieces by such composers as Scarlati,[2] Alberti,[3] or Mondonville,[4] or of airs from the operas of Rameau,[5] Piccini,[6] and Gluck.[7]

[1] Claire Joseph Hippolyte Legris de Latude, commonly known as Mademoiselle Clairon; b. 1723, d. 1803. She had made her *debut* at the Théâtre Français in the rôle of Phèdre in 1742, and from that time forward remained one of the most popular Parisian actresses of the period.

[2] Giuseppe Scarlati; b. 1718, d. 1796.

[3] Dominic Alberti, the inventor of a new method of piano playing, and composer of pianoforte pieces that enjoyed considerable popularity in those days.

[4] Jean Joseph de Mondonville, commonly called Cassanea; b. 1715, d. 1773.

[5] Jean Philippe Rameau, the author of various works dealing with harmony and the theory of music; b. 1683, d. 1764. Among his most successful operas were "Castor and Pollux" and "Hippolyte and Aricie."

[6] Nicolas Piccini; b. 1728, d. 1800. His operatic chef-d'œuvre was "Didon," produced in 1783.

[7] Christophe Gluck; b. 1714, d. 1787. His three most popular operas were "Orphée," "Alceste," and "Iphigénie en Aulide."

The names of these two last composers recall an ever fertile subject of argument among the habitués of Madame Necker's salon—that is to say, the rival merits of the Italian and German schools of music. Represented at that period by Gluck and Piccini, whose operas were performed in Paris between 1770 and 1780, German and Italian music had become a favourite theme of discussion at all the chief meeting-places of society, and one to which the utmost importance was attached.

Christophe Gluck, who had been music-master to Marie Antoinette in the days of her childhood at Vienna, had become her protégé after her marriage, while Nicolas Piccini, formerly "maître de chapelle" to the King of Naples, had obtained the favour and protection of Madame Dubarry. Both "Gluckistes and Piccinistes," as they were called, were strongly represented at the Hôtel Leblanc —the former by the Abbé Arnaud,[1] Suard, and du Rollet;[2] the latter by Marmontel, Morellet, d'Alembert, and de Chastellux. On one occasion a discussion between the rival supporters became so heated that Madame Necker's dinner-party was completely disorganised, and her own enjoyment entirely put an end to. The chief offenders appear to have been Marmontel and Suard, who, suddenly

[1] François Arnaud, Abbé de Grandchamp, sometimes called "Le grand pontife des Gluckistes"; b. 1721, d. 1784.

[2] Marie François Louis Gand Leblanc du Rollet; b. 1716, d. 1786. He collaborated with Gluck in writing the two operas, "Iphigénie en Aulide" (1774) and "Alceste" (1776).

losing all self-control, engaged in a violent altercation, which nearly had a disastrous ending.[1]

The music finished, one of the company, who had probably been requested to do so by his hostess beforehand, would rise and declaim verses by some favourite poet, with gestures befitting the subject, or read aloud passages from the correspondence or the works of eminent men. This, more almost than any other, was a variety of entertainment that appealed most strongly to all present.

In addition to their dinner-parties and occasional balls in the course of the winter, the Neckers sometimes invited a few of their friends to supper at nine in the evening. Madame d'Oberkirch, who saw so much of the social life of Paris at that time, states in her 'Mémoires' that the guests who were invited to this repast stood in a very different relation to their hostess to those whom she invited to dinner. Though Madame Necker often made exceptions to this rule, her contemporaries seldom invited to the latter function those with whom they felt themselves to be on terms of close intimacy. Such people generally comprised men and women of a certain age, neither particularly interesting nor attractive to the mistress of the house, but to whom, for a variety of reasons, she desired to show some hospitality. To supper, a far less formal meal than dinner, she invited her own especial friends and a few clever and amusing persons,

[1] Mémoires de Morellet.

whom she not only liked herself, but upon whom she could always depend to add to the gaiety of the occasion. Many of these men and women had spent the earlier hours of the evening flitting from one friend's house to another, so that by the time they reached their final destination they had probably collected all the latest town gossip, and were thus in a position to be able to maintain a ceaseless flow of sparkling conversation upon any subject they might reasonably be expected to discuss.

Madame Necker's social activities were not solely confined to the various forms of entertainment she arranged at her house in Paris, for during the summer months she used often to receive her friends at the châteaux which, at different times, her husband rented or owned on the outskirts of the city. The first of these was a historic sixteenth-century mansion, situated in the Bois de Boulogne, and had once been the residence of François I., who had built it after his return from captivity in Spain. The Château de Madrid, as it was called, was both as regarded situation and proximity to Paris all that the Neckers could desire, but being only held by them on lease did not possess in their eyes any of the attractions of a personal possession. Thus, a few years afterwards, Necker purchased the Château of Saint Ouen, which stood on the banks of the Seine, not far from Saint Denis. In this delightful house, with its broad terrace from which was obtained a charming view of a wooded island

in the middle of the river, and its park or large garden with groves and alleys of clipped trees, symmetrically arranged according to the fashion of the period, Madame Necker used to welcome those among her friends who had not gone "en villégiature," and were spending the summer like herself within a mile or two of Paris.

Sometimes she invited them to sup and spend the night at Saint Ouen; at others, to take part in little informal gatherings, which usually continued until a late hour of the night, and were much enjoyed by all who attended them. For those of her literary friends who were not sufficiently well off to be able to drive out to see her, Madame Necker would usually send her own carriage, and this little act of kindness was repeated when, at the end of a pleasant evening spent in the gardens or on the terrace of the château, they desired to return home once more.[1]

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

CHAPTER VIII.

Enjoying every advantage which wealth and position could procure her, with a husband she adored, and a child who, her friends were beginning to tell her, was exceptionally talented, Madame Necker had much to make her happy. As Voltaire once told her, she was "one of the most privileged beings that the eternal and unchanging order of things had created on this little globe."[1] Yet, owing to the hard and severe discipline to which she was beginning to subject her inner life, she was unconsciously placing in the path of her contentment obstacles which, in course of time, were even to undermine her happiness. Every day, with scrupulous care, she examined her conduct from the point of view of duties performed or neglected, and thus prevented herself from either appreciating or enjoying the signal advantages which a beneficent Providence had bestowed upon her. Largely dictated by an over-sensitive conscience and an irrepressible desire to study and analyse everything connected with the life of the

[1] Voltaire's "Correspondance."

soul, this vigorous system of perpetual self-examination seriously interfered with her peace of mind, and gradually introduced an atmosphere of constraint into her personal relations with her family and friends. Necker, who perhaps alone knew of the spiritual anxieties from which his wife so often suffered, used sometimes to say "that there was only one thing she required in order to be considered perfectly delightful, and that was a little more indulgence towards herself."[1] This observation, coming from one who came into daily contact with her, is of some interest in showing how far Madame Necker's attitude of mind affected her intercourse with her husband. To him it was nothing less than a matter of profound regret that she should perpetually harass herself with imaginary cares and perplexities which a little sound reasoning might so easily have dissipated. But he was powerless to prevent her following the *régime* she had adopted, and could only do his best to counteract as far as possible its wearisome and depressing effects.

It was probably at this same period of her life that she attempted with mathematical precision to apportion her time between the claims of seven different responsibilities—that is to say, her husband, her child, her friends, her clothes, society, housekeeping, and the poor. Every evening she recorded in a book kept for the purpose the number

[1] Madame Necker de Saussure: 'Notice sur le Caractère et les Écrits de Madame de Staël.'

of hours she had devoted to each, and at the end of the month read through what she had written and determined whether or not she had conscientiously fulfilled her obligations.[1] This exacting division of duty, though doubtless looking well on paper, was, of course, quite impracticable in the midst of the endless and unforeseen incidents of daily life in Paris. After a short time, therefore, she wisely decided to abandon it.

Rule and order, which governed her own moral conduct, were again important features in the education of her only child. For Germaine Necker had now emerged from infancy, and was beginning to occupy a conspicuous place in the family. In appearance she was not a lovely child, nor even, indeed, a pretty one, but her large and lustrous eyes, brilliant complexion, and air of extreme intelligence, redeemed her face from plainness.

Perched on a stool beside her mother's chair, she was often present at Madame Necker's assemblies, and received a good deal of attention from the older men, who were greatly attracted by her sprightliness and vivacity. "Hardly had she seated herself in her accustomed place," records her governess, "before three or four 'vieux personnages' came up and talked to her with the kindliest interest: one of them, who wore a little round wig, used to take her hands in his, and while he thus held them conversed with her as if she had

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

been a young lady of five-and-twenty. That man was the Abbé Raynal; the others were M. Thomas, M. Marmontel, the Marquis de Pesay,[1] and the Baron de Grimm." [2]

Madame Necker did not altogether approve of the amount of notice that Germaine attracted among the members of her salon, and considered, rightly perhaps, that a conspicuous place in society for a child of seven was scarcely calculated to assist the formation of her daughter's character in the way she most desired.

During the summer months mother and daughter usually retired to the Château de Madrid, and in later years to Saint Ouen, while Necker, occupied with his diplomatic duties as Minister of the Republic of Geneva, either remained in Paris or attended the Court at Versailles and Fontainebleau. Only occasionally, when an opportunity presented itself, did he drive out from the city to spend an evening with his wife and child.

In the country, where there were fewer demands upon her time than in Paris, Madame Necker was able to devote a considerable part of the day to Germaine. Scarcely for a moment, indeed, did she let the child out of her sight, and on her walks or

[1] Alexandre Frédéric Jacques Masson, Marquis de Pezay, a Genevese by birth, had made a fortune in the administration of the finances of the Duchy of Lorraine; he was later ennobled, and finally became known as the author of a number of poems and other works of rather dubious merit; b. 1741, d. 1777.

[2] Madame Necker de Saussure: 'Notice sur le Caractère et les Écrits de Madame de Staël.'

Photo by *Frédéric Boissonnas, Geneva.*

GERMAINE NECKER AS A CHILD.

By courtesy of the Proprietors of 'L'Art et les Artistes.'

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at her games was always at hand to encourage or reprove as occasion demanded. Although she allowed her a certain amount of liberty for amusements natural to her age, yet even these had invariably to give way to habits of discipline and self-control, and it appears almost as if, in her anxiety to bring up her daughter in accordance with her own ideals, Madame Necker forgot the importance of first trying to understand the imaginative and high-spirited nature with which she was dealing. Germaine's intense vivacity was thought to border on frivolity, and her demonstrations of affection were not seldom checked because they were supposed to show too much expression of feeling.

So far, however, the strictness of her upbringing does not appear to have alienated the child's devoted affection for her mother, and during these early years of her childhood "Minette," as she was called, certainly did her best to conform to her parent's wishes.

When, in July or August, the Neckers went off for a few weeks to Spa, Mont Dore, or one of the other watering-places they yearly visited for the sake of Madame Necker's health, Germaine was left in the country under the care of her *bonne*. On these occasions she frequently received visits from her mother's friends, who used to drive over from Paris or from one of the neighbouring châteaux to see her. Among them was her godmother,

Madame de Vermenoux, who, having lately lost the greater part of her fortune, had given up her hôtel in the Rue Grange Batelière, and now lived in a small house at Sêvres.

One day, in the summer of 1770, when M. and Madame Necker were taking the waters at Spa, she went to the Château de Madrid, and there, to her great amusement, she found her godchild being entertained by two elderly ecclesiastics,[1] one of whom she had induced to act as her husband and the other as a fortune-teller.

Another of Germaine's visitors who did much to relieve her solitude in the absence of her parents was the fascinating Madame d'Houdetôt,[2] whose name, so familiar to readers of French Mémoires dealing with this period of the eighteenth century, has been immortalised by Rousseau in his 'Confessions.'

The daughter of a rich and prosperous "fermier-général," Sophie de Lalive de Bellegarde had made an ill-assorted marriage in her youth with Comte d'Houdetôt, a distinguished general, with whom she had naught in common. Ere long, however, she sought and found consolation in a friendship with Saint Lambert,[3] which was to endure for the whole of the rest of her life. Without possessing any particularly remarkable characteristics, she was yet

[1] The Abbés La Guerche and Quesnel.

[2] Elisabeth Françoise Sophie de Lalive de Bellegarde; b. 1730, d. 1813.

[3] See page 148.

of such a winning, light-hearted, and attractive disposition that she inspired her friends with the greatest affection for her. Among them Madame Necker, whom she used at one time to meet at "La Chevrette," the house of Madame d'Épinay, her sister-in-law, was ever an especial favourite. For the latter was sometimes invited to "La Chevrette" to witness the brilliant little theatrical performances which frequently took place there under the able direction of the mistress of the house. Both she and Madame d'Houdetôt greatly enjoyed these amateur entertainments, Madame Necker being often lost in admiration at the degree of perfection reached by actors and actresses in their interpretations of M. de Chastellux' 'Pretensions,' or of his prose translation of 'Romeo and Juliet.' But in addition to these meetings at "La Chevrette" they arranged others at their respective country houses. The Countess's châtelet at Sannois was within easy reach of Saint Ouen, so that in the summer time she and Madame Necker were often able to exchange visits and enjoy many a pleasant "causerie" away from the bustle and noise of Paris. Though greatly differing in character and temperament, they cherished a true, deep, and sincere affection for one another, which remained unbroken until after the beginning of the Revolution. Madame d'Houdetôt never felt rebuffed by that coldness of manner with which many of her women acquaintances reproached Madame Necker, and having soon

discovered the most attractive side of her nature, she was the more able to appreciate those sterling qualities which placed her friend on a higher level than ordinary mortals. For her part, Madame Necker had always been fascinated by the bright, ingenuous, and sympathetic nature of this delightful woman, who seems to have had so much of the charm and so few of the defects of her class. Apart from the ties of friendship, by which they were so long bound, however, there was yet another bond between them, represented by Saint Lambert, who was not only the recognised lover of Madame d'Houdetôt, but a popular member of the literary society of Madame Necker. The poet's fervent attachment to the Countess and hers to him had become so much part of their lives that society, indulgent to a passion which had so successfully withstood the test of time, looked upon it with approval if not with admiration. Madame Necker did not, perhaps, regard it quite so leniently, but since, through lapse of time, it had now become perfectly innocent, she felt no reluctance whatever in receiving Saint Lambert at her Fridays, or in returning the affection of the lady he adored.

In the spring of 1776 M. and Madame Necker, accompanied by Suard, paid a visit of five or six weeks to London. They had apparently decided to make this expedition with a view to obtaining rest and change after a fatiguing winter of social engagements, and in pursuit of this object had no

desire to avail themselves of the introductions to English people of position with which many of their acquaintances would have been glad to furnish them. Most of their time in London was spent in visiting different places of historical interest, including, of course, St Paul's and Westminster Abbey. In her 'Mélanges' we find a letter written about this time by Madame Necker to Thomas, in which she describes her impressions of the latter, and of the tombs of the great departed she had seen there. These monuments to the glory of the dead seemed to her of small interest, set up in surroundings where, in her opinion, "glory did not exist," and she was far more impressed on being shown, in the middle of a beautiful garden, a column which Pope had erected to the memory of his mother.

Although she and her husband did not wish to make any new acquaintances in the course of their brief visit to England, they nevertheless saw something, probably not for the first time, of Horace Walpole, who at that period so constantly frequented the salons of Paris, and in particular that of Madame du Deffand. A meeting of far greater interest, however, was one which took place between them and Gibbon. About a year after her marriage Madame Necker had had a visit from her former lover, who she and her husband had received with marked cordiality. Nevertheless, on that occasion, Gibbon had been somewhat piqued because Necker,

putting complete trust in his discretion, had left him one evening to entertain his wife when he (Necker) went off to bed! "Could they insult me more cruelly?" Gibbon complained in a letter to his friend Holroyd, "ask me every evening to supper; go to bed and leave me alone with his wife—what an impertinent security! It is making an old lover of mighty little consequence." [1]

Madame Necker had long ago lost all actual affection for Gibbon, but the remembrance of how he had once requited her love was still fresh in her mind, and naturally made her feel some pride in letting him realise by her present surroundings the extent of her husband's devotion to her and the position of luxury and ease to which his wealth had raised her. He did not fail to be impressed as much by these as by a change he remarked in herself, who, though "as handsome as ever," he considered "much genteeler" than when he had last seen her. He particularly noticed, however, her altered views with regard to money, and in this connection relates the following conversation he had with her:—

"I was (perhaps indiscreetly enough)," he says, "exalting Nanette d'Illen's [2] good luck and the fortune. 'What fortune?' (said she, with an air of contempt),—'not above twenty thousand livres a year.' I smiled, and she caught herself immediately. 'What airs I give myself in de-

[1] Gibbon's 'Miscellaneous Works.' [2] A mutual acquaintance.

spising twenty thousand livres a year, who a year ago looked upon eight hundred as the summit of my wishes.'"[1]

Meeting her once again after an interval of over ten years, Gibbon gladly renewed his amicable relations with Madame Necker, and during the whole of her visit to London was ever in close attendance upon her.

"At present," he mentions in a letter dated May 20th, 1776, "I live with her just as I used to do twenty years ago, laugh at her Paris varnish, and oblige her to become a simple reasonable Suissesse. The man" (meaning Necker), "who might read English husbands lessons of proper and dutiful behaviour, is a sensible good-natured creature."[2]

When, not long afterwards, they left England to return to Paris, the Neckers warmly pressed him to visit them there as soon as a convenient moment arrived, and, as we shall see, towards the close of the following year he did so.

During the ensuing summer, most of which she spent as usual at the château of Saint Ouen, Madame Necker continued to follow the same pleasant though not over-exacting round of social engagements which has been described in an earlier chapter. Thanks, in a great measure, to the lavish hospitality which characterised their entertainments, she and her husband had now gained so

[1] Gibbon's 'Miscellaneous Works.' [2] Ibid.

much consideration in the "beau monde" that even the most exclusive members of society were delighted to accept invitations to her balls, supper-parties, and theatricals.[1]

Among the most recent of her new acquaintances was the aged Madame du Deffand, whose salon had long been the resort of every one who possessed any claim to distinction in politics, art, or letters.

Marie de Vichy Chamrond, Marquise du Deffand, had been, during the earlier years of the century, one of a bevy of lovely women who had graced the Court of the Regent, and had even, it is supposed, been at one time a mistress of that Prince himself. After spending her youth at La Madeleine du Traisnel, a convent in Paris over which presided Françoise de Villemont, a lady who, from the number of her admirers, appears to have been an uncommonly gay and worldly abbess, Marie de Vichy married, at the age of twenty-one, the Marquis du Deffand, "a man of good birth but a poor husband, by character mediocre and meddlesome." Nevertheless, for ten years she managed to put up with his failings, and only at length determined to obtain a formal separa-

[1] In reference to these festivities M. Taine, in his 'Origines de la France contemporaine,' states that "Necker, ayant donné un souper splendide avec opéra sérieux et opéra bouffon, il se trouve que cette fête lui a valu plus de crédit, de faveur et de stabilité que toutes ses opérations financières . . . on parle . . . de la fête qu'il a donnée, et qu'à Paris comme à Versailles on en détaille tous les agréments, et que l'on dit tout haut: Ce sont des gens admirables que M. et Madame Necker, ils sont délicieux pour la société."

tion from him because she desired to efface the remembrance of her former gallantries at the Court of the Regent, and to lead henceforward a life of propriety. Not long afterwards she began to form a salon of men of letters, chiefly recruited from among the protégés of the Duchesse du Maine, whose court at Sceaux she had often attended. These men first began to frequent her house in the Rue de Beaune, and then, a few years later, her fine suite of rooms in the convent of Saint Joseph. At the time she removed to the latter she was already well on in years, and her one remaining aim in life was to "lay up for herself a pleasant and easy old age in the bosom of many friendships." This wish was destined to be fulfilled, for from that time until the end of her life her salon continued to be a meeting-place for notabilities belonging to almost every sphere of society, and who consisted not only in august personages attached to the Court, but in a host of learned celebrities, such as d'Alembert, Montesquieu,[1] Pont de Veyle, the President Hénault,[2] David Hume, and Horace Walpole. Her correspondence with the latter, covering a period of nearly half a century, has become a valuable record of a time when dis-

[1] Charles de Secondat, Baron de la Brède and de Montesquieu, littérateur and philosopher; b. 1689, d. 1755. He was the author of the celebrated 'Lettres Persanes' and 'L'Esprit des lois.'

[2] Charles Jean François Hénault, the historian; b. 1686, d. 1770. The author of a 'Nouvel abrégé chronologique de l'Histoire de France' and of a number of comedies and tragedies which enjoyed considerable popularity in the middle of the eighteenth century.

tinguished men and women from all parts of Europe met together in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of a great city, which was then regarded as the centre of European culture and civilisation.

With advancing years Madame du Deffand's sight began to fail, until at last, with what appeared to her the most appalling suddenness, she found herself totally blind. She remained, however, in full possession of her other faculties, and still kept up her lifelong reputation as a "coiner of sparkling epigrams." "With few traces of her once radiant beauty, she was now thin, pale, and white-haired." Her face, when in repose, "had come to wear an expression of sadness, occasionally of disillusion and preoccupation," but when talking or listening to conversation, her "features acquired light from the inward fires of her mind, and really gave the illusion of restored sight." With no particular education, but intelligent, quick, and extremely witty, she had been considered one of the finest conversationalists of her day, for she had successfully cultivated that peculiarly French faculty of being able to introduce a vein of facetiousness and wit into the most trivial topics of discussion. In old age she continued as acute a judge of character as ever, and prided herself not a little upon being able to discern at once the artificial mannerisms of those who desired to gain a prominent place in society at the expense of truth and sincerity. Her close connection with the *élite* of the literary

world, and her constant desire to know every one who was worth knowing, alike contributed to bring her in touch with M. and Madame Necker. At the commencement of her acquaintance with them she discovered in both qualities she was able to value the more highly because so few other people she knew possessed them. Full of admiration for the excellent, straightforward character of the one, and the natural, unaffected disposition of the other, she began by finding their society extremely congenial, and although she had so "little taste for philosophical discussion," managed to derive a good deal of enjoyment from the suppers to which they invited her. It was not very long, however, before she discovered that they did not suit her so well as she had at first supposed, and then her opinion of them soon became less favourable.

"M. Necker," she observes in a letter to Walpole,[1] "is a most excellent man, with a great deal of sense, . . . extremely natural, frank, and lively in company, but says little and is often preoccupied. . . . I must admit, too, that he is wanting in one most delightful quality, and that is a certain kind of ability to impart humour to the person you are talking to; he never helps to develop what you are thinking about, and you feel more stupid with him than when quite alone or with any one else."

Of Madame Necker she wrote: "His wife is

[1] Correspondance de Madame du Deffand.

intellectual, but in too lofty a way to make it possible to exchange ideas with her; . . . (she) is stiff, cold, and full of self-respect."[1]

Yet although she had begun to feel that she had but little in common with the Swiss banker or his "estimable" wife, Madame du Deffand continued, nevertheless, to go and see them, knowing that she could always count upon meeting at their house people of her own circle to amuse her.

On the other hand Madame Necker, though forced to admire the old lady's marvellous penetration and discernment, can never be said to have felt much in sympathy with her. To her thinking the Marquise was too incisive and critical in her judgment of the world in general and of private individuals in particular to possess any of the charms of gentler and less cynical natures, such as those of Madame d'Haudetôt or of Madame de Lauzun. Of all her friends there was not one whose character Madame Necker admired more intensely than that of the last of these two women, who was the granddaughter and heiress of the once notorious Maréchale de Luxembourg.[2]

Amélie de Boufflers, Duchesse de Lauzun, was the

[1] Correspondance de Madame du Deffand.

[2] Madeleine Angélique de Neuf-ville-Villeroy; b. 1707, d. 1787. She married firstly Joseph Marie, Duc de Boufflers, and after his death, in 1747, Charles François Frédéric, Duc and then Maréchal de Luxembourg. At this time she maintained, at her hôtel in the Faubourg Saint Germain, a salon for men and women in her own rank of life, and exercised, as an arbiter of deportment and etiquette, immense and almost despotic influence over the "jeunesse dorée" of both sexes.

daughter of the Duc de Boufflers, a son of Madame de Luxembourg by her first marriage. One of the most attractive personalities of the "haute noblesse" of those days, she had been forced, while still in her teens, into a union with the Duc de Lauzun,[1] a young roué who, for no other reason than her reputation for virtue and extreme timidity, took an invincible dislike to her, and deserted her a few hours after their marriage had taken place. His subsequent career, with which we need not here concern ourselves, was as remarkable for brilliant military exploits as for innumerable love affairs with beautiful women belonging to many different nationalities.

Crushed and broken-hearted by the infidelity of a husband whom she secretly adored, Madame de Lauzun returned a year later to the Faubourg Saint Germain, to the house of her grandmother, with whom she continued to live until the Maréchale's death in 1787. Spending several weeks of each summer at Madame de Luxembourg's château at Montmorency, she used often to go over from there to see Madame Necker at Saint Ouen, and began in this way to form a friendship with her. From the "portrait" we find of Madame de Lauzun in the 'Mélanges,' Madame Necker appears to have felt strongly attracted by her the first moment she saw her, and soon came to regard

[1] Armand Louis de Gontant, Duc de Lauzun, and later Duc de Biron; b. 1747, d. 1793.

her as the living realisation of an ideal being she had often imagined but never expected to see.

"In order," she says, "to know human nature in all the radiance of which it is capable, so that it may inspire us at once with as much interest as admiration, we must picture to ourselves in youth's features a truly divine blending of virtue and beauty. When I used to think of the wondrous and sublime harmony of these two perfections, and afterwards scold myself for giving too much attention to an imaginary prodigy, I saw at last my ideal realised, for I saw Émilie. Who has ever known that delightful woman without at once experiencing the sweetest sentiments of love and friendship? Her artless grace might well, I admit, inspire too passionate feelings were these not held in check by the noble modesty of her glance and the heavenly expression of her face. Seldom does Émilie praise virtue, for, without admitting it, she knows that to do so would be to praise herself. The great regard she enjoys when still so young is not due to virtue alone; it is due to the purity of her inmost self, to the character of her thoughts, which is demonstrated by everything she says and does, and shown by the very expression of her face,—it is to these that she owes the respect and esteem that is felt for her. As a rule, women who desire popularity try to insinuate themselves into the hearts of others by means of flattering words and by every sort of attention.

Émilie, on the contrary, has never evinced towards people who are indifferent to her any other feelings than those of goodwill, and thus has she won the approval of every one."

Madame Necker's opinions of her friend have been endorsed by those of many of her contemporaries, to whom it was afterwards a cause of profound regret that one whose disposition was in every way so truly lovable should not have been spared to end her life in peace and contentment.

Arrested in 1792, Madame de Lauzun remained imprisoned for over a year, and though her husband seemed to wish to make amends for his past neglect by trying to secure her release, his intervention was of no avail, and she was eventually sentenced to death in December, 1793.

CHAPTER IX.

In the autumn of 1776 an event took place which went far towards fulfilling Madame Necker's ambitions for her husband's advancement. On the 22nd of October the King, acting on the advice of the Comte de Maurepas,[1] nominated Taboureau de Réaux, a former Governor of Valenciennes, Controller-General of Finances, and Necker his associate as Director of the Royal Treasury.

Among the chief considerations which had led Maurepas to recommend the latter to the King had been Necker's reputation for scrupulous integrity throughout a long and honourable business career, and the importance at this time, when war between France and England appeared imminent in America, of obtaining the services of a capable and experienced financier to conduct the affairs of the Treasury. Necker had partly, it is true, been chosen on the strength of the high opinion that the finance world had formed of his ability: the

[1] Jean Frédéric Phélypeaux, Comte de Maurepas, Secretary of State under Louis XV., and at this time "Chef du Conseil des Finances"; b. 1701, d. 1781.

Court had also, however, from time to time, received practical proof of this characteristic in the pecuniary assistance he had given in moments of emergency.[1]

Since 1768, when, as Minister of the Republic of Geneva, he had made his first appearance at Versailles, he had on more than one occasion saved the Treasury from serious embarrassment, and in the course of the negotiations that had taken place between himself and the Government he had won the confidence and esteem of the Duc de Choiseul, who had expressed the highest admiration for his powers.

On the publication of his celebrated 'Éloge de Colbert,' in 1772, he had again attracted attention. In this work, which was crowned by the Academy and widely read in all ranks of society, Necker had sketched his own ideal "of what he considered a Finance Minister ought to be," and had given his readers to understand "that he himself would realise this ideal if ever he was called to power." [2] His 'Éloge,' new in style, still more so in ideas, bore less resemblance, indeed, to "an academical discourse than to a programme for the Ministry." [3]

[1] "Ce Genevois," writes Marmontel, "qui depuis a été le jouet de l'opinion, et si diversement célèbre, était alors l'un des banquiars les plus renommés de l'Europe. Il jouissait dans son état de la confiance publique et d'un crédit très étendu. Du côté des talens, il avait fait ses preuves ; et sur des objets analogues au Ministère des finances, ses écrits avaient annoncé un esprit sage et réfléchi ; mais, pour lui, un autre mérite auprès de Maurepas était la haine de Turgot."—Mémoires de Marmontel.

[2] Sainte Beuve, 'Causeries du Lundi.'

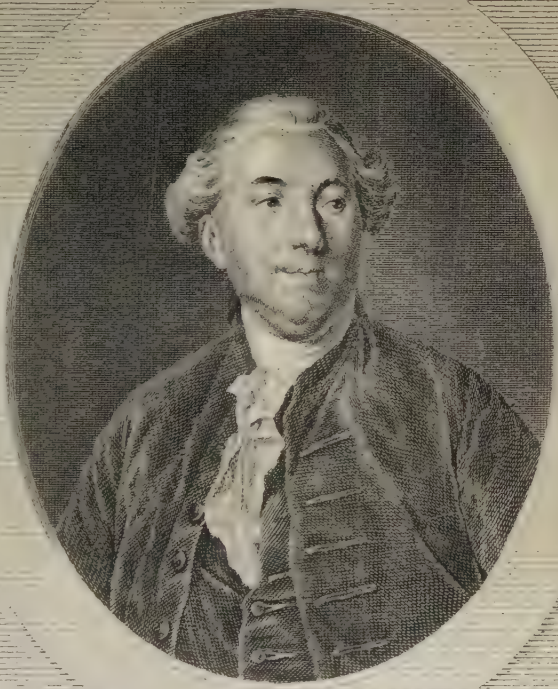
[3] Ibid.

Three years later he had once more brought himself prominently before the public eye by a treatise which dealt with a subject of considerable importance. This treatise was entitled 'Sur la législation et le commerce des grains,' and dealt exhaustively with the question of taxing exports of grain, in opposition to the theories advanced by Turgot and by the principal economists of the day. Meeting with a most favourable reception, it is said to have done more than anything else its author had previously written to bring about his call to office.

The announcement that Necker, "a Protestant, a Republican, and a foreigner," was to be appointed to a post of so much influence and responsibility as the Directorship of the Royal Treasury, was naturally received in many quarters with a good deal of disapproval. Dignitaries of the Church openly denounced the selection of a heretic, and the Archbishop of Paris went so far as to remind the King that "by virtue of the Edict of Nantes a Protestant could not occupy any important position in the State." Afterwards, however, "when he saw that in spite of the representations he had made Louis Seize was determined to maintain Necker at the head of the finances," he entirely changed his attitude towards that Minister, and even became one of his strongest supporters.[1]

The disapproval expressed by certain of his subjects made the King reluctant to take the step

[1] Rocquain, 'L'esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution.'



JACQUES

NECKER,

Né à Genève, en 1734,

Mort dans la même ville en 1804.

he had originally contemplated of placing Necker at once in absolute control of financial affairs, and for this reason he decided to effect a compromise by naming Taboureau de Réaux "Contrôleur-Général des Finances," and Necker his associate as "Conseiller des Finances" and "Directeur-Général du Trésor Royal." By this means adverse criticism was in a measure silenced, and the difficulty of admitting a Protestant to a seat at the Council of State to which, as Controller-General, Necker would have been fully entitled, was successfully overcome. Nevertheless, it was intended by the Government that the latter should exercise as much influence as possible over the administration of finances, and that the duties of Taboureau should chiefly be confined to making reports to the Council upon matters of importance.

During the opening months of his first administration Necker concentrated his efforts upon a far-reaching scheme of financial reform. Not wishing to impose fresh taxes upon the lower classes, he trusted in the efficacy of loans to put an end to the existing state of financial embarrassment. Thanks to the respect in which his name was held in business circles, these loans were at present easily obtainable. Contracted as they were, however, at frequent intervals throughout the whole of his subsequent Ministry, they eventually gave rise to much dissatisfaction among men who felt that by giving so much attention to the replenishment of

the Exchequer he was neglecting other and equally pressing reforms, the importance of which he either ignored or underestimated.[1]

But these and other matters relating to his policy at that period we will introduce to our readers in another chapter, for we must now return to the affairs of his wife.

Fully confident in her husband's ability to discharge the onerous duties he had undertaken, Madame Necker was immensely gratified to see him placed at last in a high position of public trust. Her unconcealed delight at the honour which had been conferred upon him was probably looked upon by more than one of the members of her literary society as a further proof of the insatiable ambition with which among themselves they often reproached her. If her gratification was due to satisfied ambition alone, it possessed at least the merit of being prompted simply and solely by a desire to see the principal object of her affection in a position to which she considered his worth entitled him. Through the medium of her salon of men of letters she had been striving for years to get her husband "praised and talked of everywhere," to the end that some day a brilliant public career might be secured to him. Now, therefore, when her object was at last attained, she had every reason to feel proud and pleased. Among those who freely criticised her intense desire for Necker's success,

[1] Rocquain, 'L'esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution.'

few realised that this was but an outward expression of the passionate adoration she felt for him. Yet so in truth it was. In Madame Necker's love for her husband there was no trace of that "methodical precision" by which all the other elements of her character were influenced, and in indulging it she went "far beyond less reasonable women," as has since been abundantly proved by the contents of the letters she directed to be given to him after her death.[1] Necker fully reciprocated his wife's affection, and had lately given her a remarkable proof that he did so.

As has been stated above, he had more than once advanced large sums of money to the Treasury, which but for his timely aid would have become involved in serious complications. In supplying these loans he had come to such a satisfactory arrangement with the Government that he could easily, had he so desired, have doubled his already enormous fortune. But with other aims in view he had then no further taste for business, and had made up his mind to sever his connection with the banking house he had founded. He therefore withdrew from it his entire fortune, the control of which, "on his accession to the Ministry of Finance," he placed unreservedly in the hands of his wife, "not wishing to have any other care or occupation than France, his adopted country."[2]

[1] Maria Norris, 'The Life and Times of Madame de Staël.'
[2] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'

Madame Necker, who refers to this incident in the 'Mélanges,' states that "he intrusted it absolutely to her, without keeping for his own use a single paper or the smallest sum of money." "Since that time," she continues, "I alone have managed it; I have bought, sold, rented, built, invested, and spent everything according to my own wishes, without hardly daring to speak to him about it, for at the first word I uttered I observed that he either became irritable or extremely annoyed. He never gave another thought to his fortune, until the moment when for an excellent reason he desired to place the greater part of it in the Royal Treasury: it then became a public object worthy of his attention."

Although he would doubtless have had his wife believe that he had made this change in the management of his fortune simply in order to be independent of private affairs while administering those of the State, Necker's real motive in doing so was also partly dictated by a wish to give evidence of his unalterable devotion to her.

Since she had married him with scarcely a penny to call her own, and owed everything she now possessed to his munificence, he could hardly have paid her a more delicate attention than this. But not content with having placed her in control of his money, he went so far as to use every argument to convince her that it absolutely belonged to her, and in course of time actually succeeded in doing so.

A few months after Necker had been appointed Director of the Treasury, Gibbon, in accordance with the promise he had made to that Minister and his wife during their visit to London, arrived in Paris for a few months' sojourn. He received from M. and Madame Necker a most cordial welcome, by which, from the following passage in one of his letters, he evidently felt greatly flattered. "You remember," he wrote to one of his friends, "that the Neckers were my principal dependance; and the reception which I have met with from them very far surpassed my most sanguine expectations. I do not indeed lodge in their house (as it might incite the jealousy of the husband, and procure me a lettre de cachet), but I live very much with them, and dine and sup whenever they have company, which is almost every day, and whenever I like it, for they are not in the least *exigeans*."

"As their friend" he "was introduced to the best company of both sexes, to the Foreign Ministers of all nations, and to the first names and characters of France." From Horace Walpole, who was also at that time in Paris, he obtained an introduction to Madame du Deffand, who he describes as "an agreeable young lady of eighty-two years of age, who has constant suppers, and the best company in Paris."

An amusing story is related by Madame de Genlis in her Mémoires in connection with Gibbon's first appearance in the salon of the aged Marquise. The

latter, being then, as already stated, afflicted with blindness, used often to ask new acquaintances to allow her to pass her hands over their faces in order that she might form some idea of their features. When Gibbon, kneeling down, raised his face to be thus examined, she could discover in it nothing but two enormous cheeks, which she did not know that he possessed. While investigating this (to her) inexplicable phenomenon, she became more and more bewildered, until at last, thinking that she had been made the victim of some practical joke, she suddenly withdrew her hands, and exclaimed in a tone of extreme indignation: "Voilà une infâme plaisanterie!"

Nevertheless, in spite of this unfortunate episode, Gibbon soon succeeded in making himself so extremely pleasant to her that during the whole of his stay in Paris she not only encouraged him to come and see her as often as possible, but availed herself of every opportunity of meeting him in society. Thus it happened that in the spring of the following year they were both present at the Hôtel Leblanc on a certain memorable occasion, when M. and Madame Necker received the unexpected honour of a visit from no less a personage than Joseph II. of Austria, brother of Queen Marie Antoinette. Under the assumed name of Count Falkenstein, the Emperor was at that time spending some six weeks at Paris and Versailles, and attended by a suite of four-and-twenty persons was residing

partly at the Austrian Embassy in Paris and partly at an unpretentious house at Versailles called the "Hôtel of the Just." [1]

Going to the furthest extreme of exaggerated simplicity in his clothes, occupations, and manner of living, he did not even have a carriage reserved for his private use, and preferred to roam about Paris on foot or in an ordinary hired conveyance. A good deal of his time was spent paying surprise visits to different people of note, and to many of the more prominent literary salons of the day. The curiosity he felt with regard to the latter naturally led him to wish to make the acquaintance of the Neckers, and thinking, no doubt, that he would most easily be able to do so by going to see them privately, he betook himself one evening to the Hôtel Leblanc.

After spending a couple of hours with Necker in his "Cabinet de Travail," discussing a variety of different political and financial questions in which he felt especially interested, he sat down to supper at half-past nine with his host, Madame Necker, and one or two guests, among whom, besides Gibbon and Madame du Deffand, were Marmontel, the Abbé de Boismont,[2] and the Comte de Schouwaloff.[3]

[1] H. Belloc, 'Marie Antoinette.'

[2] Nicolas Thyrel de Boismont, celebrated preacher and academician; b. 1715, d. 1786.

[3] André, Comte de Schouwaloff, the Franco-Russian littérateur; b. 1727, d. 1789.

His Majesty treated every one he met that evening with so much urbanity that Madame Necker, who had herself been greatly struck by the charm of her Imperial visitor, afterwards confided to one of her friends that "he had turned all heads at her house." The impression he made on Parisian society in general, however, was not so favourable as that which he had left behind him at the Hôtel Leblanc. Madame du Deffand declared later that as he did not single out any one for especial marks of favour, those who particularly wished to be so honoured began to look rather askance at his advances. This was, in fact, the truth, for in the course of his many visits to distinguished people in Paris he took care to observe in his manner to all exactly the same degree of gracious affability.

Among other celebrated men who came in for a share of his attentions was Madame Necker's friend, the Comte de Buffon. When quietly at work one morning, arrayed in the dressing-gown he habitually wore on such occasions, the great naturalist was much embarrassed on seeing his Majesty suddenly walk into his room. Hastily rising and making a profound obeisance, he begged to be allowed at least to go and change his clothes, but the Emperor put him at once at his ease by remarking that "when a master receives his pupil he should do so entirely without ceremony."[1]

The supper-party which "Count Falkenstein" had

[1] Nouvelle Biographie Universelle.

honoured by his presence at the Hôtel Leblanc was destined to be one of the last which Madame Necker was to give there, for less than two months later she and her husband were to take up their residence at the Hôtel du Contrôle-Général in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs. This move was brought about through Necker's appointment to the Director-Generalship of Finances on the 29th of June.

During the nine months that he and Taboureau de Réaux had conjointly carried on the affairs of the Treasury, the latter had spent most of his time endeavouring to get possession "of the emoluments of his position which had been unclaimed by his predecessors." His tenure of office had proved unsatisfactory from every standpoint, and his dilatory methods of administration had not seldom been the cause of friction between his painstaking associate and himself.

At last, as it became daily more evident that he was entirely unfitted for the post he occupied, it was decided to make another change in the Ministry, and Taboureau was requested to resign. He did so, and soon afterwards Necker was placed in supreme control of the Treasury as Director-General of Finances.

On taking office as a Minister of France he was obliged, of course, to relinquish his appointment as representative of the Republic of Geneva. While the "Magnificent Little Council" of that city had had reason sometimes to complain of the lack of

zeal he had displayed in furthering the interests of his native country, it now most deeply regretted the loss of so rich and influential a public servant as himself. On the other hand, considerable pride was manifested at the confidence that the French Government had reposed in him by confiding to his care such an important branch of the administration as the Treasury, and in commemoration of the event a medal was struck, bearing his effigy on one side and an appropriate inscription in Latin on the other.[1]

At the time that her husband resigned his diplomatic appointment, Madame Necker made efforts to induce her old friend Moultou to try and secure for himself the vacant post. It was now twelve years since last she had seen that excellent man, but long separation and altered circumstances had done nothing to cool the warmth of her affection for him, and he still remained, what he had always been, her confidential friend and adviser. Although, ever since her marriage, they had continued regularly to exchange letters, these had never been able to supply the place of personal intercourse, and Madame Necker had often greatly regretted that her residence in a foreign land should have cut her off so completely from this friend of bygone days. She had often longed for some opportunity of bringing herself again into closer touch with him, and this she had

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

hoped could at last be achieved if Moultou would use what influence he possessed to obtain the appointment her husband had vacated. This hope was never destined to be realised, however. Either because he himself had no desire to quit Geneva, or because, in the opinion of the "Magnificent Little Council," he did not possess the necessary qualifications for such an important position, Moultou was never chosen to represent the Republic at the Court of France. But if, as seems most likely, he had not been able to gratify Madame Necker's wishes in one direction, he did so in another, for not long afterwards he and his son accepted an invitation from her to come to Paris and visit her in her new home.

According to the custom of those days their visit lasted for several months, and during that time Madame Necker constituted herself their guide to objects of interest in the city, introduced them to her literary friends, and did all in her power to make their stay in Paris a successful one. As Necker was engaged for most of the day in transacting business connected with his new and heavy responsibilities, the companionship of Moultou was at this time especially welcome to her; and it was also a great satisfaction for her to feel that whenever, in her husband's absence, she felt perplexed with regard to any matter of doubt or difficulty, she could always obtain from her old friend the sympathy and advice she needed.

After they had been at the Contrôle-Général for some weeks, she came to consider her guests as part of the household, and almost forgot that a day would eventually come when they would have to return to Switzerland once more. When, therefore, the hour of their departure at last drew near, Necker, fearing that the sorrow of bidding them farewell would be too much for his wife in her habitually delicate state of health, decided not to inform her that they had gone until they were already well on the road towards the frontier. Nevertheless, the effect of this news was far worse than he had anticipated, for no sooner did Madame Necker realise that her friends had left Paris than she gave way to an outburst of uncontrollable grief, from which for a while nothing would rouse her.[1]

The departure of the Moultous forestalled by a few weeks that of Gibbon, who returned to England at the end of the summer. On the day he came to take leave of the Neckers an amusing little incident occurred. Germaine, who had been summoned downstairs to say good-bye to him, observing the evident distress it caused her parents to part from him, and anxious to do something to give them pleasure, suggested in all seriousness that she should marry Gibbon, "in order that they might constantly enjoy his society!"[2]

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'
[2] Maria Norris, 'The Life and Times of Madame de Staël.'

During the autumn of 1777 Madame Necker began to take in hand what has always been considered the most admirable work of her life, namely, the founding of a hospital for the poor of Paris. In the month of August, by an Order in Council, a Commission had been appointed to inquire into the condition of existing institutions of this kind, and the King had himself contributed a sum of money from the Privy Purse in order to promote the necessary reforms.

The management and accommodation of French hospitals were then of an exceedingly primitive and inadequate description. The sick were so ill-cared for that it was no uncommon proceeding to place two or even three of them together in a single bed, and only a few months before this time the Emperor of Austria had paid a visit to one of the principal "Hôtels Dieu," and had seen, to his horror and disgust, a corpse lying thus between a sick man and a dying man. Madame Necker's aim was to put an end to these, and other even more revolting abuses, and "to show the possibility of nursing sick people, each one in a bed to himself, with all the care dictated by the kindliest humanity, without exceeding a fixed price." To her initiative was also due the excellent plan, which was later to become general throughout France, of procuring the aid of religious sisters to look after them. The hospital which she founded in 1778, and which still bears

her name, contained at first accommodation for a hundred and twenty patients, but later, when the success of her scheme became evident, the building was considerably enlarged. In order to carry on the good work as effectually as possible, she secured the help of twelve nuns from the convent of "La Charité," and placed them under the immediate supervision of the curé of Saint Sulpice, in whose parish the hospital was situated. When all her arrangements for opening the building were completed, a service of dedication was held by the above-named curé, who, in the course of the prayers he offered up, "did not fail," says Grimm, "to bestow on the foundress of that house all the praises her zeal deserved; but in order to expiate the compliments he had paid at the foot of the altar to the virtue of a heretic, he concluded his address with the most fervent prayers for her conversion."

In carrying out her project of hospital reform, Madame Necker was fortunate enough to obtain the support of Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris, who had lately begun to show herself and her husband a good deal of civility. One of the greatest and most enlightened prelates of the day, M. de Beaumont had often caused considerable stir in ecclesiastical circles by the inflexibility of his religious opinions. As an inveterate opponent of the philosophers, Jansenists, and other supporters of atheistic or heretical ideas, he had more than

once endured exile and imprisonment for the sake of his convictions. Yet apart from his intransigeant views, his charity and ability to forget past injuries had endeared him to a great number of friends and admirers. An instance of his magnanimity is found in the following well-known anecdote: One day Madame de Marsan, a friend of the Archbishop's, went to see him at the archevêché. While waiting in an anteroom she saw to her amazement a man come out of his study, who she knew to be one of his bitterest opponents, and who had recently published a scurrilous libel against him. Recollecting, however, the Archbishop's proverbial generosity, it occurred to her that perhaps this man had traded upon it to the point of coming to beg for money. In this conjecture she subsequently proved to be correct. M. de Beaumont, though perfectly aware that his visitor had publicly maligned him, had, nevertheless, on hearing he was in difficulties, felt no scruples in immediately handing over to him the sum of 15,000 francs.

His friendly relations with the Neckers would seem hard to account for, having regard to his religious opinions and to the opposition he had shown at first to M. Necker's appointment, were it not that their philanthropic aims were identical with his own. Thus was he able not only to overlook their attachment to the doctrines of the reformed faith and their constant and friendly intercourse with encyclopædists and philosophers,

but even to place his services at Madame Necker's disposal.

In the course of their united efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the sick and poor of Paris, he paid on one occasion a signal compliment to her painstaking efforts.

The Municipality of Paris had brought a lawsuit against him with respect to certain claims, but having lost the case was compelled to pay him an indemnity of 500,000 livres. The greater part of this sum he handed over to Madame Necker to be spent as she thought best for the public good, only stipulating that an account of the expenditure should be presented to the King. It was probably about the same time that he caused some surprise and amusement to the society of the salons by sending her and M. Necker an invitation to dine with him at the archevêché, and by summoning no less than ten other prominent ecclesiastics to meet them. This was considered for Protestants an unprecedented honour.

Scarcely was it to be expected that Madame Necker's philanthropic efforts would escape the criticism which a scheme of that kind was almost sure to meet with from one quarter or another. The ladies of the Court, who, with one or two exceptions, knew her as little as they appreciated her, declared that her charity was dispensed in such an ostentatious manner that all the world knew of it. In saying this they doubtless forgot

that a great deal of the money expended upon her hospital had been subscribed by the King himself, and for this reason it would not have been fitting on her part to have kept her activities a profound secret.

If any mistake had been committed on the side of publicity, it was to be found in an unfortunate remark that her husband had made to Louis Seize. Summoned one day to Versailles to present his Majesty with an account of the different branches of his Administration, Necker had blandly informed the King that the greatest of them all had been directed by his wife. Such an outspoken tribute to Madame Necker's ability was considered by over-critical courtiers the height of bad taste.

CHAPTER X.

"Occupied from morning till night, Necker with the multifarious business connected with his position, and his wife devoting herself with equal zeal to the prisons and hospitals, it would be difficult to discover what were their pleasures, or what were the honours, profits, or advantages they could hope to derive from such an existence."[1] Thus, some years later, wrote Madame de Staël when describing this period of her parents' life. Her remarks concerning the exacting nature of their occupations are confirmed by an allusion that Madame Necker makes to the latter in one of her letters to Thomas. "What do you think, Monsieur," she asks him, "of this fine kind of life at the Contrôle-Général, where even the power of conversing with your friends is denied you? It is just as if you were in one of those dreams in which you want to talk to a shade you love and cannot utter a single thing; words seem to expire on your very lips. Thus have I suffered all through this week; as soon as ever I took up my pen I had to put it down again, . . .

[1] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'

but still, one always finds some happy moments, and since I am writing to you this is one of them."

Besides her hospital, the management of which claimed so large a share of her time and attention, Madame Necker had now begun to interest herself in the reform of the prisons, the condition of which was wretched in the extreme. For the most part overcrowded, filthy, and ill-ventilated, many of them contained subterranean cells into which light and fresh air could seldom penetrate, and where prisoners, either awaiting trial or serving their sentences, were allowed to exist in a state of pitiable misery and squalor. To improve the lot of these unfortunates by providing them with better accommodation and healthier surroundings was one of the chief aims of Madame Necker and her husband throughout the remaining years of their residence in France; and this was an enterprise which, before the beginning of the Revolution, they had already done much to accomplish. But not only did they endeavour to render less miserable the lives of State prisoners and the sick and suffering poor, but they also rescued many an unfortunate infant confided to public pity on the steps of churches in the poorer quarters of the city: these they either committed to the care of respectable foster-parents, or obtained for them admission to the Foundling Hospital, to the maintenance of which they liberally subscribed.

Madame Necker had now good reason to style

her salon, as she had begun to do, "un bureau d'esprit et de commisération," for there, amid her circle of intimate friends, were evolved those excellent projects for the good of humanity which, thanks to her husband's support and influence, she was afterwards able to put into execution.[1]

But although her life was at this time so much devoted to philanthropic occupations, she yet contrived to keep up her interest in literary matters and her connection with men of letters. To them her husband's rise to power had been a source of unbounded satisfaction, which was not uninfluenced, in the case of one or two, by the personal advantages they hoped to gain from it. Such interested persons were rather the exception than the rule, however, and it is but fair to add that the delight evinced by the majority of his wife's friends on hearing of Necker's appointment was by no means prompted by mercenary considerations. Men such as Thomas, Buffon, Grimm, Diderot, Saint Lambert, and Suard, who sincerely had the good of their country at heart, looked upon his accession to the Ministry as the inauguration of a new era of advancement and prosperity, and hoped that through him their "Utopian dreams" of social reform might at last be realised.

[1] "With such men," writes Madame de Staël, "as Buffon, Thomas, Marmontel, Saint Lambert, Suard, and the Abbé Morellet, M. and Madame Necker coalesced in forming the holy league which at that time watched over the honour and happiness of France."—'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père,' by Madame de Staël. 1818.

The literary atmosphere so long associated with Madame Necker's assemblies was now beginning to give place to one of a political and official character. This was due as much to her husband's appointment as to the change that had taken place in the circle of her acquaintances, in which were not only people with similar tastes to her own, but those who occupied high positions in many other walks of life, including that of diplomacy. Although she had hitherto been unacquainted with most of the Ministers, ecclesiastics, and Court dignitaries who now frequented her salon, she already possessed, among the members of the "corps diplomatique," two friends of some years' standing. One of these was the Swedish Ambassador, the Comte de Creutz,[1] who was at this time a familiar figure at every literary and artistic *réunion* in Paris. With lofty ideals and poetic inclinations, he combined an intense admiration for genius and moral excellence, and a passionate love of the beautiful in whatever form he met with it. Owing to the number of his intellectual accomplishments he was considered by his friends something of a prodigy, and such he certainly appears to have been. For in addition to his linguistic gifts, which comprised a mastery of most ancient and modern languages, he had acquired an extensive knowledge of European literature, natural history, and science. As a

[1] Gustave Philippe, Comte de Creutz; b. 1726, d. 1785.

young man he had cultivated a taste for "belles lettres," and subsequently through "various graceful poems of his own had done much to revive the love of poetry among his compatriots." During the twenty years he resided in Paris he was accustomed to spend much of his time in the society of poets, artists, and men of letters, and these he ever delighted to welcome at the Swedish Embassy in the Rue du Bac.

Less learned, perhaps, than the Comte de Creutz, but not less attractive in the eyes of Madame Necker, was Viscount Stormont, the British Ambassador.[1] Possessing many of the same refined and intellectual tastes as his brilliant colleague the Comte de Creutz, Lord Stormont was also to be seen in most of the celebrated salons of the day, in which from his good looks he was known as "le bel Anglais." His acquaintance with the Neckers had begun soon after his arrival in Paris as British Ambassador in 1772, and previous to her husband's appointment to the Treasury he had often attended Madame Necker's Tuesdays and Fridays at the Hôtel Leblanc. In course of time he came to be regarded by them both as an "ami de la famille," and after he returned to England in 1778 he began an intimate correspondence with Madame Necker, which continued until the time of her husband's second Ministry.

[1] David Murray, Viscount Stormont, afterwards 2nd Earl of Mansfield, diplomatist and statesman ; b. 1727, d. 1796.

While his wife was occupied for many hours of every day with matters connected with the management of her hospital, of which she was at once the treasurer and directress, Necker, to use the words of Grimm, "passed decrees which covered him with glory." Faced as he was by immense and almost insuperable difficulties, and already opposed by a large and influential group of politicians, he had nevertheless succeeded in carrying through various projects of economy and reform, and had shown that he possessed the qualities of an able and enlightened administrator.

By having recourse to loans which, as we have previously stated, he found no difficulty in obtaining, he was doing his utmost to reduce an enormous deficit of nearly thirty million livres, and to keep pace at the same time with current expenditure. But although his system of perpetual borrowing enabled him to satisfy the more urgent needs of the present, it placed upon the Exchequer a new and heavier burden for the future. To minimise, as far as possible, the effects of this burden, Necker relied upon certain economical reforms he intended to introduce, the most important of which were to entail the suppression of a number of lucrative Court appointments. He was well aware that a project of this kind would certainly meet with the strongest opposition from men of power and influence at Versailles, but in carrying it out he knew that he could rely upon the support of public

opinion which, owing to his well-known desire to assist the labouring classes, was at this time wholeheartedly accorded him.

But for certain international developments, over which he had no control, he might well have brought to a successful issue his extensive schemes for extricating the country from some at least of the serious difficulties in which it had become involved. In directing the financial policy of the Government, however, he had either overlooked or insufficiently taken into account the importance of an event that had been almost inevitable at the time he had taken office. This was the American campaign, the cost of which was to fall so heavily upon the Exchequer, and to render the precautions he had taken only partially effective.

It will be remembered that Louis Seize, having entered into an alliance with the revolted English colonists in America, declared war against England in the summer of 1778. The subsequent expenses of that war, "of which it was impossible to foresee the duration," made Necker's task more arduous than ever, since in a comparatively short space of time they contributed to raise the deficit to about four hundred and ninety million francs. He endeavoured to cope with these heavy liabilities by raising fresh loans and by redoubling his efforts to put an end to all unnecessary expenditure in every Government department in which he exercised authority.

He still hesitated, however, to reduce the number of civil and Court officials to the extent he had originally intended. The changes he had already made in that direction had aroused such bitter animosity among his Ministerial colleagues, that he felt reluctant to pursue a policy which he feared would render his position intolerable until it actually became imperative that he should do so. It was not, in fact, until two years later, in 1780, that he found himself at last compelled to institute those reforms in the Royal household without which he then felt that no system of economy would ever be complete.

Certain highly paid positions known as "Contrôleurs Généraux de la Maison du Roi" were abolished by an act passed in January of that year, and in the course of the next few months were suppressed some of the salaries, "indemnities," pensions, and perquisites which were enjoyed by so many of the courtiers of Versailles, and which are said to have annually cost the Treasury no less than twenty-eight million francs.[1]

Necker, who had personally inquired into every detail connected with the management of Court affairs, also endeavoured to put a stop to the excessive waste that had hitherto been allowed to continue unchecked in more than one branch of the Royal establishment, and he is said to have carried his persistence to the point of ordering

[1] Rocquain, 'L'esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution.'

that the candles nightly used to light the reception-rooms at Versailles should be used until finished, and not, as heretofore, replaced when only half-burned.[1] In addition to reforms such as these, he was actively engaged in making others of importance in his own department. He had already effected an immense improvement in financial control, particularly with respect to the "Caisses Royales," which he had united under one head, and placed directly under his own personal supervision; but he was now engaged in the far more difficult and thankless task of reducing the number of "Fermiers Généraux" and "Receveurs Généraux," who enjoyed the right to retain a large share of the dues they collected as the appointments of their office. His desire to suppress as many of these posts as possible was not only influenced by economical considerations, but by the hope that he would be able to employ part of the funds so saved on behalf of the proletariat, whose cause from the first he had warmly espoused.

The reforms he had introduced at the beginning of his Ministry had only been accomplished in face of strong opposition from men of position at Court. Those of far greater magnitude which he had since instituted had raised in the same quarter a storm of resentment against which he would have found it extremely difficult to contend had he not been able to count upon the King's approval.

[1] Rocquain, 'L'esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution.'

Throughout his first Ministry relations between the Sovereign and himself were characterised by sentiments of mutual confidence and esteem, that had been partly if not entirely promoted by the philanthropic aims they possessed in common. Louis Seize was not only willing to further Necker's efforts to improve the condition of the people, but was also ready to assent to any reasonable scheme for curtailing Court expenses that his Minister thought fit to recommend. He was unable, however, to regard with equal favour changes in the Government of France, which the Director-General foresaw would eventually have to be made in a constitutional direction. To Louis Seize and his brothers such changes seemed likely to undermine the prestige of the Crown, and for that, if for no better reason, must ever be persistently opposed. Apart from the respect entertained for him by the King, Necker enjoyed but little favour among other members of the Royal Family, with the exception, perhaps, of the Queen, who, outwardly at least, concealed any antipathy she may have felt for him. Brought into frequent touch with Marie Antoinette, when he went to Versailles or Fontainebleau to confer with her husband on affairs of State, Necker found her on all occasions gracious, amiable, and kind-hearted, even when, as was sometimes the case, he firmly declined to carry out her wishes with regard to the pecuniary favours with which she constantly desired to load her friends.

With the King's brothers, on the other hand, he was always on the coldest terms. Both the Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois deeply resented his system of suppressing appointments in the Royal households, and they openly sympathised with the great nobles whom he had deprived of the emoluments they had formerly enjoyed.

Outside Court and official circles, however, his popularity remained unimpaired; the measures he had taken to put an end to crying abuses, and the untiring interest he had displayed in the welfare of the poor, had gained him the goodwill of a very large section of the community.

With the object of securing an equitable system of taxation for all classes, he now petitioned the King to create Provincial Assemblies[1] throughout the country, and at the same time submitted to his Majesty a confidential Mémoire containing, among other suggestions, the following: "that exemption from taxation should henceforward be withdrawn from the 'Cours Souveraines,' which exercised judicial authority in certain of the larger cities in the provinces; that 'Intendances,' or local Governorships, should be suppressed on the score of 'exercising tyrannical powers over the people'; that the rights enjoyed by provincial Parliaments should be considerably curtailed, and that tithing

[1] Necker intended Provincial Assemblies to be commissions composed of deputies chosen from the three orders, who should assemble at stated intervals of time, properly assess the taxes, and watch over the interests of the poorer classes.

should be abolished." This Mémoire, which was afterwards published through a betrayal of confidence, became, as will be seen, one of the principal causes of Necker's approaching downfall. His project of establishing Provincial Assemblies throughout France was opposed by most of his fellow-Ministers, but notwithstanding their opposition three were created and subsequently proved successful.[1] But although he had done much to reorganise and improve financial administration, the Director-General was powerless to prevent the perpetual drain upon the resources of the Treasury entailed by the war with England. Moreover, he was at last beginning to find some difficulty in raising the enormous funds he required. Since it was commonly believed that the Exchequer was well-nigh depleted, people hesitated to intrust their capital to a source from which it seemed doubtful that they would ever get a return, and Necker was thus faced with the possibility of being no longer able to obtain the loans upon which he had hitherto so much depended. It was with the object of restoring some degree of confidence to the public mind with regard to the financial position of the Treasury that he now decided to issue his famous 'Compte Rendu.' This historic document, printed and published with the King's consent, contained a complete statement of accounts connected with revenue, taxation, and expenditure.

[1] In Berry, Dauphiné, and Haute Guyenne.

In it were found detailed explanations of sums annually expended upon lands and forests, the upkeep of the Royal establishments and the salaries paid to those who at present held appointments at Court, and the pensions which had been granted to others who had formerly done so. Adequate proofs were also given to show that *if certain reforms were continued* the finances of the country could always be maintained on a perfectly satisfactory basis, and that in spite of the enormous cost of the war and the loans, amounting to 412,000,000 livres, which had been raised to meet it, "*ordinary* State revenues exceeded by 12,200,000 livres *ordinary* annual expenses."[1]

In the course of his statistics Necker appealed to the humanity of his readers by reminding them of the deplorable condition of those classes which had always contributed so largely to the Exchequer, but over whom an iniquitous system of grinding taxation and compulsory labour was allowed to hold despotic sway. Finally, with pardonable pride, he referred to the numerous reforms he had instituted at the Treasury during the past five years, and declared that from the moment he had taken over the direction of that department "he had renounced the pleasantest of private satisfactions, namely, that of serving his friends or of obtaining the gratitude of those who surrounded him." "If any one, he added, "owes either employment or place to my

[1] Mémoires de Marmontel.

favour alone, let him name himself."[1] He omitted to mention, however, the most remarkable instance of his disinterestedness, which lay in the fact that he had entirely declined to accept from his adopted country the smallest remuneration for his services. But his reticence on this point was due less to his own modesty than to a desire expressed by the King that he should not refer to it.[2]

The sensation created throughout France by the publication of Necker's 'Compte Rendu' was naturally tremendous. Many declared "that the appearance of this admirable Mémoire would mark a period for ever glorious in the annals of the Monarchy," since never before had such an outspoken declaration been made to the nation regarding facts that had remained until now the exclusive property of the King, his Ministers, and a few other privileged persons. Read by the majority with feelings of unbounded admiration, it enormously increased the esteem in which its author was held, and raised him for the time to the level of a popular hero. By an influential few, however, it was regarded far less favourably, and of these some saw in it nothing more "than the work of an administration infatuated and puffed up with its own importance, and others the work of a charlatan."[3]

The revelations which the Director-General had

[1] Louis Blanc, 'Histoire de la révolution française.'
[2] Rocquain, 'L'esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution.'
[3] Ibid.

made concerning the abuses that had so long been permitted to continue at Court naturally gave dire offence to those who had chiefly profited by them, and who now resolved to revenge themselves by employing every means in their power to overthrow him. Prominent among his opponents was the aged Comte de Maurepas, who but a few years before had been instrumental in bringing about his appointment to the Finance Ministry. Ever jealous of the popularity of others, Maurepas could ill disguise his chagrin at the enthusiastic reception which the 'Compte Rendu' had met with, especially when he saw to what extent that famous report had augmented Necker's popularity. For a long time past he had disapproved of the latter's reforming policy, but he had recently become more than ever incensed as he observed the influence which Necker exerted over the opinions of the masses.

Resentment, in addition to jealousy and disapproval, were, therefore, the principal factors which had combined to make him join that party at Versailles which desired to see the Director-General removed from office. Meanwhile his colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs,[1] had taken more active steps to achieve that end, for he candidly expressed to the King his conviction

[1] Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes ; b. 1717, d. 1787. Previous to his appointment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1774 he had been Ambassador to Turkey (1754-1768) and Ambassador to Sweden (1771-1774).

that it was dangerous to leave in the hands of such a man "the most delicate Ministry of the Kingdom."

A little later Necker received an unexpected proof of the sinister intentions of his enemies in the publication of the Mémoire he had presented to Louis Seize at the time of the establishment of Provincial Assemblies. The administrative changes he had recommended to the Sovereign in that report aroused such violent hostility among the different parties whose long-established privileges he proposed to abolish, that even the King's determination to maintain him in office seemed visibly shaken. He now saw that it would no longer be possible for him to administer the finances of the Realm unless he could obtain some signal mark of the Royal confidence. He therefore requested to be allowed to occupy a seat at the Council of State, a privilege which had hitherto been firmly refused him. Maurepas, to whom he made this demand, was wily enough to inform him that it would at once be granted if he would consent "to abjure the errors of Calvin" and be received into the Church of Rome. To agree to such a proposal was manifestly impossible for a man of Necker's high-principled character, and seeing that no other course lay open to him, he reluctantly decided to resign.

Hearing that he intended to do so, the Queen, who knew how ill his services could at this time be

spared, begged him to take at least twenty-four hours to reconsider his decision. For a space, therefore, his retirement was still postponed, and during that interval of time he sent to ask Maurepas to nominate him to the Ministries of War and Marine. Unable to obtain this new appointment, however, he no longer hesitated to send in his resignation, which was accepted by the King on the 19th of May, 1781.

CHAPTER XI.

The news of Necker's resignation did not become generally known in Paris until Sunday the 20th of May, the day after it had been accepted by the King. While, owing to the enormous number of libels which his enemies had caused to be published against him, his retirement had seemed imminent for many months past, it nevertheless gave rise to the utmost consternation among the general public.

Grimm, who was in Paris at the time, describes in the following words the scenes he witnessed in the streets in the course of that memorable day. "The walks, cafés, and public places," he writes, "were crowded with people; an extraordinary silence reigned; men looked at each other and shook hands, just as I should say they would do in face of a public disaster — did not these first moments of despair more resemble the grief of a distracted family which had just lost the object and mainstay of its hopes?"[1] In the evening a play, called "La Partie de Chasse de Henri IV,"

[1] Grimm, 'Correspondance inédite.'

was performed at the Comédie Française. Every sentence and incident in that piece which could possibly be thought to have any bearing on what had occurred was immediately seized by those present as a pretext for giving vent to their grief at Necker's resignation, and for showing the respect and gratitude they felt for him.

In the meantime the object of these demonstrations had begun to receive from all parts of the Kingdom an endless number of letters, odes, and panegyrics expressing unstinted admiration for all that he had achieved during the five years he had been in office. Bearers of illustrious names, men and women of distinction and high degree, vied with one another in praising the reforms he had introduced and in deploring the circumstances which had brought his Ministry to such an untimely ending. For this the Court alone was held responsible, and in consequence both the King and his Ministers came in for no small share of adverse criticism. Many believed that Necker had been sacrificed to the prejudice of the Sovereign's unscrupulous advisers, and this conviction rendered yet greater the mistrust and dislike with which these men were becoming universally regarded. On the other hand, the opposition that the ex-Minister's noble and disinterested efforts had met with, and the arbitrary manner in which resignation had been almost forced upon him, had but served to increase

the esteem that was felt for him, and to convert his retirement into a triumph.

Necker was not, however, the only recipient of marks of popular appreciation. Many of the letters he received referred in glowing terms to the admirable work his wife had accomplished in founding a hospital for the poor of Paris. Not seldom, also, it was to her rather than to her husband that their friends addressed the praises they intended for him, because, so Madame Necker declared, whenever they attempted to talk to him about himself, "his modesty forbade him paying the least attention to what they were saying."

During the last two years of his administration, Madame Necker had suffered acutely from the calumnies that had been so widely propagated against him, and in which even her own name had not always been respected.[1] Although she had told her friends that she considered such things should be treated with the scorn they deserved, she had nevertheless been very greatly oppressed by them. Knowing better than anyone the immense amount of time and labour that Necker had devoted to his duties, which he had conscientiously discharged to the best of his ability, she naturally resented the injustice of these malicious publications. The vexation and annoyance that they had caused her were to some extent allayed by the innumerable tributes of

[1] Rocquain, 'L'esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution.'

praise and regard which long continued to reach him from every quarter, but even these could do nothing to lessen the disappointment she felt at the check his career had received. It was thus with a heavy heart that she prepared to leave the Contrôle-Général, and to accompany her husband to their country house where, for the time being, they principally intended to reside.

On the way thither they were met by Marmontel, who, as soon as he heard of Necker's resignation, had hastened to Saint Ouen in order to express to the late Minister and his wife the concern he felt at what had taken place. The high opinion he had formed of Necker's capacity after many years' acquaintance, and the admiration with which that statesman's endeavours to serve his adopted country had inspired him, made Marmontel sincerely regret that so excellent and conscientious a Minister should have been obliged, by force of circumstances, to retire from office. Moreover, "the particular affection with which Madame Necker had honoured him led him to feel an additional interest in an event which he had no doubt would greatly affect her." [1]

Hearing that he had already been to Saint Ouen, and, not having found them there, was then on his way to seek them at the Contrôle-Général, the Neckers begged him to enter their carriage and return with them to the château. This he at once

[1] Mémoires de Marmontel.

consented to do, and eventually remained with them for the rest of that day.

"Neither husband nor wife," he states, "disguised from me their intense sorrow. I did what I could to mitigate it by speaking of the regrets they would leave in the public mind, and of the respect that would follow them into retirement; and in saying so I was not flattering them."

While Madame Necker appears to have given full vent to her grief, her husband, though feeling inwardly as overwhelmed as herself, managed to maintain more self-composure. "I regret only," he told Marmontel, "the good which I had to do and which I should have done, had time been allowed me." Later, as he followed the course of events in France, this regret was exchanged for remorse, that in relinquishing his post at such a critical time he had consulted his own feelings rather than the safety of France, which, if he had remained in office, he felt that he might have been able to save from bankruptcy.

For several days after he retired to Saint Ouen, Necker received visits from a number of distinguished personages, who out of sympathy, respect, or obligation, drove out from Paris to see him. Although not a few of these had desired his removal from the Treasury, they did not permit their political opinions to outweigh the claims of ordinary civility which dictated that respect must be shown for the fallen Minister. Prominent among them

were the Duc d'Orléans,[1] his son the Duc de Chartres,[2] the Prince de Condé,[3] the Archbishop of Paris, who has been described above, and many other men of rank, such as the Prince de Beauvau,[4] the Maréchal de Richelieu,[5] and the Duc de Luxembourg.[6]

It would appear strange to find the latter among Necker's supporters, as many of them professed to be, were it not that in the circles of society in which they moved it had lately become the fashion to decry the corruption of the Court, and to admire that spirit of liberty and justice which had been so eloquently expressed in the 'Compte Rendu.' It was particularly among men of this stamp, whose political views were of a liberal and progressive tendency, that Necker's reforms had found the

[1] Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orléans ; b. 1725, d. 1785.

[2] Louis Philippe Joseph, Duc de Montpensier, Duc de Chartres, and finally Duc d'Orléans ; b. 1747, d. 1793. He was known during the Revolution as Philippe Égalité.

[3] Louis Joseph de Bourbon, Prince de Condé ; b. 1736, d. 1818. Celebrated at this time for his magnificent fêtes at Chantilly ; he commanded, during the later years of his life, the army of emigration.

[4] Charles Juste, Maréchal de Beauvau ; b. 1720, d. 1793. After a distinguished military career he was made Commander of Languedoc in 1763, Academician in 1771, Governor of Provence in 1782, and Marshal of France in 1783.

[5] Louis François Armand du Plessis, Duc de Fronzac, and afterwards Maréchal de Richelieu ; b. 1696, d. 1788. Famous in his youth for many notorious love-affairs, prominent among which was his liaison with the Duchesse de Bourgogne, he afterwards became celebrated for his military successes.

[6] Anne Charles Sigismond de Montmorency-Luxembourg, Duc de Piney-Luxembourg and Duc de Châtillon, Lieutenant-General and peer of France ; b. 1737, d. 1805. He headed the Noblesse on the assembling of the States-General in 1789.

greatest appreciation, and their support, which had always been of immense assistance to him, had encouraged him to believe that outside Court and Ministerial spheres his efforts for the good of France were both understood and approved of.

Among the letters he continued to receive from all parts of the country was one which must have occasioned him as much amusement as surprise. His daughter, "constituting herself the mouthpiece of a grateful nation," ventured to address to him an anonymous testimonial of congratulation upon the excellence of his late Administration. For some time after receiving this interesting document, both he and his wife were not a little puzzled as to its authorship, but at last, after reading it through with greater attention, they came to the conclusion that it bore unmistakable traces of Germaine's style.

It is not easy to say with certainty whether on making this discovery Necker commended or rebuked his daughter, but since, for many months previously, he had been endeavouring to dissuade her from further developing her literary gifts, we are inclined to think that he could not have been altogether pleased with the step she had taken. He had ever been firmly convinced that women were not intended by nature to follow the same vocations as men, even though they might possess the ability to do so; and it was precisely for that reason, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, that he had always

gently but persistently opposed such inclinations in his wife.

There was a time when it seemed not unlikely that Germaine would fall in with her father's wishes in this respect, and abandon her literary ambitions for ever. Fortunately for posterity, however, nature became too strong for her, and she found herself irresistibly compelled to pursue her attempts at dramatic composition, in which, until her marriage, she was chiefly interested. About two years before the time of her father's retirement from the Treasury, her health had given her parents cause for much anxiety, and had necessitated a complete change in her mode of life. At the age of thirteen she had become subject to attacks of nervous prostration, not unlike those from which her mother continually suffered, and followed, as in the case of Madame Necker, by a condition of extreme exhaustion bordering on collapse. Dr Tronchin, the celebrated physician, whom her mother had formerly known at Geneva, and who now possessed a large and fashionable practice in Paris, was summoned to see her, and at once prescribed complete rest of mind and body, country air, and entire liberty to do exactly as she pleased. In consequence of this advice Germaine, accompanied by her governess Mademoiselle Huber, to whom she was greatly attached, was sent off to Saint Ouen, where she passed the next few months in a state of unclouded happiness.

Much of her time was spent in composing verses, reciting passages from her favourite plays and poems, and in acting small duologues with her governess in the seclusion of the park and gardens surrounding the château. These dramatic inclinations had begun to assert themselves at a very early period of her childhood, when one of her favourite amusements had been to cut small figures of Kings and Queens out of coloured paper, move them about a miniature stage, and declaim their different parts in a plot of her own invention. These primitive efforts gave place in course of time to others of a more ambitious nature. In later years she was sometimes permitted to invite a few children of her own age to take part in performances in which she usually interpreted the principal rôles herself. Certain privileged members of her mother's salon were occasionally allowed to witness these, and when they did so were not a little astonished by the realism of her impersonations. But not content with performing short pieces by well-known playwrights of the day, she sometimes acted others that she had composed herself. Of these a comedy, entitled "The Inconveniences of Life in Paris," had met with marked success. Grimm, who was amazed by such an achievement on the part of so young a child, expressed the opinion "that it was not only astonishing for her age, but superior to her models."

Although her delicate state of health between

1779 and 1781 had been a source of great concern to both her parents, it had been to her mother a bitter disappointment as well. In carrying out the directions of Dr Tronchin, Madame Necker knew that her cherished schemes for the proper formation of Germaine's character must now be indefinitely postponed, if not altogether abandoned. Far from even indirectly attributing her daughter's unsatisfactory condition to the constant restraint and arduous study that she had herself imposed upon her, she could do nothing but regret the irreparable check her education had received.

During the last two or three years before her health broke down, Germaine had undoubtedly suffered from her mother's severe, restraining influence. For, "instead of promoting," says Madame de Saussure, "by encouragement and direction, the development of that nature which God had made so rich and expansive, she [Madame Necker] employed every means she could think of to curb, thwart, and check it, according to her own narrow and confined standard of perfection." [1]

In a sense, however, she could not help doing so: for by no other means did she conceive it possible to instil into her daughter's mind those lofty principles and high ideals that she considered it essential for her to possess. Madame Necker

[1] Madame Necker de Saussure, 'Notice sur le caractère et les écrits de Madame de Staël.'

could never love what she did not admire, and since her admiration for relatives and friends alike could only be inspired by qualities of exceptional virtue, it was natural that she should use every endeavour to inculcate them on her only child. Duty and filial obedience, which had so largely influenced her relations with her own parents, were, in her eyes, the most important points to aim for, and it was by continually enforcing their observance that her educational system was found by Germaine so hard and irksome.

Never outside the family circle, however, was the latter known to rebel against her mother's discipline, and afterwards, when an ill-assorted marriage and some experience of life's hardships had led her to take a more indulgent view of things, she came to see that the maternal severity had been prompted by the best of motives. It was then at last that she was able to appreciate certain sides of her mother's nature that she had formerly never rightly understood, and sometimes to say to herself: "The longer I live, the better I understand my mother, and the more my heart feels the necessity to be at one with her." [1]

Although regrettable in some respects, Germaine's upbringing was not without advantages in others, for owing to the extensive studies in which she was made to indulge as a child, she

[1] Madame Necker de Saussure, 'Notice sur le caractère et les écrits de Madame de Staël.'

early acquired a knowledge of literature that subsequently proved of immense value to her. The literary side of her education was one which ever afforded her real pleasure, even though she and her mother so seldom agreed in their preference for contemporary writers. But notwithstanding their different tastes in that direction, Madame Necker, who had always enjoyed intellectual pursuits above all others, did not hesitate to gratify without stint or scruple a like propensity in her daughter.

If Germaine's relations with her mother left something to be desired, during these years of her childhood, her intercourse with her father was ever characterised by that spirit of harmony and agreement which forms the basis of so many great and lasting attachments. His sympathy, affection, and invariable kindness acted as palliatives for her mother's strictness, and were not only acknowledged by her with intense gratitude, but rewarded by a devotion such as is not often met with. When she grew older there sprang up a sort of tacit understanding between them which would never have been possible between herself and her mother. It was the natural outcome not only of their complete comprehension of each other, but of their community of ideas upon a variety of different subjects of equal interest to them both.

Even during the earlier years of her life, Necker had always cast an indulgent eye upon those little

defects in his daughter's character, which he used to think his wife was sometimes too quick to mark and reprove. At that time, after a long day spent in transacting financial business, he delighted in an hour's recreation in the society of his child, whose high spirits and precocious chatter both amused and refreshed him. Eager on her side to avail herself of any excuse to remain beside him, Germaine derived from her father's society and conversation, which with her could be extremely bright and entertaining, a charm and pleasure such as she found in those of no one else.

On occasions when his wife thought fit to admonish her for some trifling misdemeanour, Necker not infrequently interposed in her favour. And if he considered that the reproof administered was out of proportion to the offence committed, he immediately took up Germaine's defence against her mother. This attitude on the part of her husband occasioned Madame Necker not a little mortification, especially when she observed that it encouraged Germaine to appeal to him whenever she (Madame Necker) felt it her duty to find fault with her.

The extremely close attachment that existed between her husband and daughter sometimes gave rise to a certain feeling of uneasiness in Madame Necker's mind, which, though groundless, was not the less distressing to her. For as she watched the gradual development of their affection

for one another, she was seized with dread lest Necker might end by preferring Germaine to herself. "The fear," it is said, "of losing the principal place in her husband's affections could alone have made the lofty soul of Madame Necker acquainted with jealousy. Had her daughter surpassed her in her own particular characteristics, she would have identified herself with successes that would have seemed to her like a continuation of her own," for in this way "she would have felt herself loved by her husband in her daughter." But Germaine was both by nature and disposition so entirely different from her, that Madame Necker was unable to recognise in her child little or anything of herself. She could not help seeing, of course, that her daughter possessed like herself strong affections, studious inclinations, and a boundless fund of admiration for everything that was great and beautiful, but she could discover in her few, if any, of those principles upon which her own ideals had been founded.

In concluding this brief account of Germaine Necker's girlhood, we will quote the impressions formed of her by a certain celebrated woman who became acquainted with her soon after her father's first retirement. This was the Comtesse de Genlis,[1] whose literary, musical, and dramatic attainments

[1] Félicité Ducrest, Comtesse de Genlis, was the author of a number of books and plays intended principally for children; b. 1746, d. 1830.

had made her such a prominent figure in the Parisian society of those days. She had at that time but recently been appointed governess to the three sons of the Duc de Chartres, one of whom—the Duc de Valois — was afterwards destined to ascend the throne of France as King Louis Philippe. Living in semi-retirement at the convent of Bellechasse, whither she had retired "in order to give her undivided attention to the education of her Royal charges," Madame de Genlis was then known as the Marquise de Sillery, a title derived from an estate that her husband had lately inherited from his cousin, the Maréchal d'Estrées. Since Bellechasse was situated at no great distance from Saint Ouen, she occasionally accepted invitations to dine with the Neckers and a few other people they invited to meet her. Her visits were returned at fairly frequent intervals by Madame Necker, who was sometimes accompanied by her daughter.

Madame de Genlis describes the latter as "not pretty but very vivacious," and considered that she "talked a great deal too much." Most of all, however, was she struck by the extraordinary interest that Germaine displayed in dramatic literature. She had occasion to remark this tendency when, during one of the visits she received from mother and daughter, she read aloud, as was often her custom, an act or two from one of her own plays, of which she was immensely proud. She had selected for Germaine's

edification a piece especially intended for young people, entitled "Zélie ou l'Ingénue." "I cannot describe," she observes, "the enthusiastic demonstrations of that young person while I was reading. . . . She wept and exclaimed at every page, kissed my hands at every instant, and repeatedly embraced me. . . ." "Madame Necker," she continues, "had brought her up badly by allowing her to spend three-quarters of the day in her salon, with the crowd of 'beaux esprits' who all surrounded her: while her mother was occupied with other people, particularly with the women who came to see her, the wits conversed with Mademoiselle Necker about love and the passions. The solitude of her own room and some good books would have been far better for her."[1] It will be seen from this description that Madame de Genlis was not very favourably impressed with the future Madame de Staël as she knew her at that period of her life, and thought that her behaviour in company showed a lamentable want of modesty and self-control. She probably little knew that Madame Necker, whom she held chiefly to blame for them, deplored even more than she did the defects in her daughter's demeanour which it was no longer in her power to remedy.

[1] Mémoires de Madame de Genlis.

CHAPTER XII.

For the greater part of the next two years Madame Necker remained with her family at Saint Ouen, where she could obtain more easily than in Paris the rest and quiet her state of health demanded. For the intense anxiety she had felt on account of her husband's difficulties, during the concluding period of his term of office, had so reacted upon her mind that she had once more fallen a victim to the disorder to which she had now been subject for so many years past. But her condition was not at present so serious as to prevent her from receiving occasional visits from her friends, or from maintaining a lively interest in her many benevolent enterprises.

After the first poignancy of her grief and disappointment at Necker's resignation had passed away, she was able, in spite of her unsatisfactory state of health, to settle down at Saint Ouen to a life of far greater contentment and peace of mind than she had ever known at the Contrôle-Général. For the one thing that she had always deemed essential to her happiness, namely, her husband's

companionship, was now hers to enjoy whenever she pleased.

Owing to the financial business that had claimed so much of his time in Paris, Necker had latterly been able to accord his wife only the most rare and fleeting moments of his society, and even when he did so his perpetual preoccupation had greatly detracted from the pleasure his presence afforded her. In those days she had more than once attributed his inattention and apparent lack of interest in herself and her concerns to waning affection for her, and that idea had become only the more fixed when she remembered the ravages which time and ill-health had begun to make in her appearance. But now at St Ouen, where he remained beside her for the greater part of every day, she perceived to her infinite relief and joy that her suspicions had been entirely without foundation, and that throughout his official career his attachment to her had never wavered.

During this brief period of peaceful retirement at her country home on the banks of the Seine, Madame Necker's chief delight lay in witnessing the marks of esteem and regard that her husband still continued to receive from his numberless admirers. Many of those who came to see him were foreigners of distinction who, out of curiosity or genuine admiration, desired to be allowed to pay their respects to him.

Amongst his most important visitors in the summer of 1782 were the Grand Duke Paul of

Russia[1] and the Grand Duchess Féodorowna,[2] or, as they preferred to be known during their sojourn in France, the Comte and Comtesse du Nord.

An interesting account of their visit to the Neckers has been recorded in her Memoirs by the Baroness d'Oberkirch,[3] who, as a personal friend of the Grand Duchess, was privileged to witness it. This lady's impressions of the ex-Minister and his wife, which are far from flattering, were influenced, we are inclined to think, by opinions she had previously formed in Court circles, which were by no means well disposed towards them. Necker, whom she compares in appearance to the magician Cagliostro, she considered the type of a very ordinary bourgeois of Geneva, stiff and disagreeable in manner, and without any ability to please in spite of a very evident desire to do so. As for Madame Necker, the Baroness considered her even less amiable than her husband. "In spite of the great position she has occupied," says Madame d'Oberkirch, "she is simply nothing more than a governess. Beautiful without being amiable, charitable without being loved, she is pretentious and pedantic beyond all expression, and there is nothing attractive either in her mind, her heart, or her person."

[1] The son of Peter III. and Catherine II. He was born in 1754, became Emperor of Russia as Paul I. in 1796, and was assassinated at St Petersburg five years later.

[2] Second wife of the Grand Duke Paul, and before her marriage Princess Dorothea of Wurtemberg.

[3] Henriette Louise de Waldner Freundstein, Baroness d'Oberkirch; b. (?), d. 1803.

Not content with these disparaging remarks as to the personal characteristics of M. and Madame Necker, this merciless critic next proceeds to ridicule the affectionate demonstrations to which they gave vent even in the presence of their illustrious guests. "They never ceased," she asserts, "to flatter each other and to pay one another compliments, especially Madame Necker, who behaved like an incense-bearer, perpetually swinging a thurible in front of her divine husband." Of the family trio, Germaine alone possesses, in the eyes of Madame d'Oberkirch, any claims to favourable comment. "Mademoiselle Necker seemed to me," this lady continues, "to be quite a different sort of person to her parents, although she also has something of Geneva and a great deal of the incense-bearer about her. Her eyes are splendid, but almost with that single exception she is plain; she has a fine figure, a good complexion, and something extremely intelligent in her glance, which is like a flame of fire. I carried away an impression of her that has since been realised. She was then, as she afterwards became, a remarkable woman."

While Madame d'Oberkirch had thus been taking stock of her host and hostess and formulating the above criticism of them in her mind, her friends, the Grand Duke and Duchess, were paying them the most flattering attentions. "Everything," observes Grimm, "that hearts imbued with a love of goodness could possibly think of to say that

was both tactful and kind they said to the virtuous successor of Colbert and to the estimable companion of his life." After referring in sympathetic terms to Necker's retirement and to the fortitude with which he bore it, they both congratulated his wife upon the excellent management of her hospital, which they had inspected on the previous day, and warmly praised the other charitable schemes in which she was interested.

In the meantime Germaine, who had been listening attentively to the conversation without taking much part in it, was becoming more and more moved by the compliments her parents were receiving. At last, being unable to contain herself longer, she suddenly gave vent to her gratification by bursting into tears, a proceeding that naturally caused a good deal of surprise to the visitors.

Seeing that the Grand Duchess appeared somewhat embarrassed by this sudden display of agitation on the part of a young lady who, she doubtless thought, should have shown more self-control, Madame Necker hastened to reassure her by saying that "her daughter alone ventured to express the emotion with which the kindness of M. le Comte and Madame la Comtesse had inspired her husband and herself."[1] Seldom, if ever, indeed, during the past year had they received from people with whom they had not previously been acquainted more sincere sympathy and appreciation than from

[1] Grimm, 'Correspondance inédite.'

this Russian Grand Duke and his wife, whose visit they recalled in after years with a deep sense of gratitude and pleasure.

During the later months of her residence at Saint Ouen, Madame Necker's condition so much improved that she was able to spend part of the next two years in Paris, where she resumed the various occupations in which she had been engaged previous to her husband's retirement.

Since the Hôtel Leblanc was at this time still tenanted by the family to whom he had let it on his removal to the Hôtel du Contrôle-Général, Necker had been obliged to seek for another town house, and had finally selected one of convenient size situated in the Rue Bergère. There for some months in the winter and spring his wife once more received her friends on Tuesdays and Fridays, and continued the traditions of her literary salon, which had now been in existence for nearly fifteen years. Owing to the prominent position her husband still occupied in the world of politics, her assemblies continued to be, as in the days of his Ministry, the resort, not only of men of literary tastes, but of those whose interests lay in a political direction.

"The salon of M. Necker had become," says M. d'Haussonville, "that which we now term a salon of opposition, where the former 'habitués' of the Hôtel Leblanc met together with those enlightened 'grands seigneurs,' among whom M.

Necker had found such warm support. Literary and academical questions were less in evidence than at the former 'réunions de vendredi'; people discussed the news of the day, groaned over the abandonment of M. Necker's projects, and criticised the acts of his successors, topics to which the master of the house probably lent a more attentive ear than at the time when he used to take no other part in the conversation than occasionally to venture an absent-minded 'Plait-il?'"[1]

Madame Necker's life in the Rue Bergère remained in most respects the same as it had been for many years past. But for her infirmity, which was now a more frequent cause of anxiety than formerly, and which had begun to make her take a somewhat despondent view of life, she would probably have been able to derive much happiness from this period of tranquillity that intervened between Necker's first and second Administrations.

Perhaps it was as much in order to try and improve her health as to remove the despondency by which she was now so often oppressed, that early in the summer of 1784 her husband decided to take her to Switzerland, where he hoped that the invigorating air of the mountains would both cheer and strengthen her. Madame Necker had always continued to cling to the associations of her native land, so that it seems probable that she welcomed this opportunity of renewing acquaint-

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

ance with familiar scenes from which she had now so long been separated. The following passage from one of her letters to Thomas enables us to form some idea of her condition after her arrival at Beaulieu, near Lausanne, where Necker had hired a house for the summer months: "On arriving here," she writes, "I was so feeble that I had to reduce myself to an almost animal existence, for which I have even less taste than inclination. But this country is well suited for this kind of occupation: nature here is fertile, and the green mountains, with summits touching the sky, and the lake, an immense reservoir agreeable both to taste and sight, are objects among which thoughts and eyes can wander pleasantly, without counting the delights of reflection; . . . the longer I remain beside this lovely model the more do I admire those who can praise and imitate nature. . . ."[1] The example of Thomas, who habitually suffered from very poor health, which he bore, however, without complaint, appears, from the following words, to have been of some assistance to Madame Necker in the state in which she then found herself:—

"The remembrance of your energy and vigour," she told him, "often helps me to bear my weakness; for it is in my thoughts that I must seek for the means of restraining a sigh which is ever ready to escape me. Neither my native air—that

[1] Sainte Beuve, 'Causeries du Lundi.'

pure, keen air you breathe here like a new element, —or excellent mountain milk, or rest, or anything else revives me, and my life is nothing more than a continual effort." [1]

The extreme physical exhaustion, sometimes accompanied by excessive pain, from which she was suffering, compelled her to remain completely inactive for days, often weeks together. From time to time, however, short periods of convalescence intervened, and during these she was able to take part in the social life of the district and to revisit the haunts of her youth. When engaged in the latter pursuit she naturally, after an absence of so many years, felt somewhat bewildered.

"On retracing my steps in this country again," she says, "I have covered in a single day an interval of twenty years; and I really do not know whether the recollections I still possess belong to me or to somebody else, and if my heart did not still continue to follow everywhere the objects of my affection and regret, I should think that only the present is reality, and that my youth had been a dream." [2]

In the summer of that year a great number of distinguished foreigners were visiting Lausanne and the neighbourhood, and among them Gibbon and the Abbé Raynal. With the former, who often entertained the *élite* of Lausanne society to tea

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker. [2] Ibid.

and supper, Madame Necker spent a good deal of her time whenever she felt well enough to do so. Gibbon had not seen her since the first year of her husband's Ministry, and was surprised to notice how great a change subsequent events had wrought in herself and Necker. He afterwards told one of his friends that he considered that they afforded "a new example that persons who have tasted of greatness can seldom return with pleasure to a private station."

Madame Necker, who had been greatly delighted to find so old a friend among her immediate neighbours, used sometimes to spend an evening with him, Raynal, and one or two other men of parts, whose interesting and instructive conversation never failed to distract and amuse her. These visits were diversified by others to any of the residents of Lausanne or Geneva who were connected with the earlier years of her life. Of these Moultou, who represented a link with the past which she had always greatly cherished, still remained her closest friend. Renewed intercourse with him, amid scenes which so vividly recalled the beginning of their friendship, not only afforded her the greatest pleasure, but enabled her to forget for a time the miseries of ill-health in retracing with him the incidents of bygone days.

It was about this time that Necker decided to purchase from Thélusson, his former partner in the Paris banking house, the château and estate of

Coppet as a summer residence for his family. Situated in the Pays de Vaud, at no great distance from Crassier, the home of Madame Necker's childhood, Coppet was, and still is, a place of considerable historic interest.

After passing through the hands of various owners, amongst whom was Count Peter of Savoy, who had served in England under Henry III., and had been rewarded for his services with the earldoms of Richmond and Essex, Coppet was erected into a barony by the Counts of Gruyère towards the close of the fifteenth century. In the course of the next hundred years it was occupied first by François de Bonne, Duc de Lesdiguières, Lieutenant-General of Dauphiné, and later by the Counts of Dohna, who belonged to an ancient family of Saxony.[1] At the time that Necker acquired it, Coppet still preserved the mediæval right of conferring the title of Baron upon its owner, together with certain feudal privileges which largely contributed to the revenue he received from those who lived upon his lands.[2]

Surrounded on one side by a finely wooded park, the "château stands on the northern side of the Lake of Geneva, and can be seen from the water rising above the village of Coppet, whose cottages seem to nestle beneath its sheltering walls." Towards the village lies the court of honour to which

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'
[2] Ibid.

access is obtained by a pillared gateway, flanked on either side by an iron grill and two massive towers of stone. Standing in the midst of beautiful surroundings, the château commanded a magnificent view of the Lake and the mountains of Savoy beyond, while to right and left the city of Geneva and the town of Lausanne were plainly discernible. When he decided to purchase this ideal retreat, Necker may well have been influenced by the hope that a few months' residence there each year might produce a soothing effect upon the sufferings of his wife, and in time, perhaps, restore her to health and strength once more.

Since the château had long been neglected, it was at this time very much out of repair, and certain restorations had to be put in hand in order to make it habitable. Until these were completed M. and Madame Necker remained at the house they rented at Beaulieu, and only took possession of their new abode when autumn had already set in. Not very long after they had done so they received a visit of some weeks' duration from Thomas. As we have already explained in an earlier chapter, this writer occupied in Madame Necker's affections a place second only to that of Moultou. Ever since he had first become acquainted with her, now nearly eighteen years before, he had been the only member of her literary circle whose sentiments and opinions exercised any lasting influence over her own. Moreover, it is said that by perpetual

Photo by *Jullien Frères, Geneva.*

THE CHÂTEAU DE COPPET FROM THE PARK.

association with him she had acquired an emphatic way of expressing herself which presented a curious contrast to her gentle voice and modest air. So great, indeed, was the confidence she felt in his judgment that she became accustomed to adopt his views with regard to almost any subject in preference to those of every one else. Whenever they were separated for any length of time she used constantly to write him letters which were intended not only to keep him in touch with her movements, but to continue the interchange of ideas upon "friendship, religion, and eternity," which had always figured so prominently in their discussions. For "although Thomas did not possess the strength of Madame Necker's religious convictions, he shared with her that modified form of deism which was the faith of religious souls in the eighteenth century."[1] Many of his replies to her letters are expressed in warm and impassioned terms, which bear witness to a responsive side of his nature of which few of his contemporaries probably knew the existence. Owing to his melancholy temperament and attitude of close reserve he had formed but few attachments, and apart from his little group of devoted friends, such as Madame Necker, the Comte d'Angeviller,[2] Malvin de Montazet,[3] and the

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

[2] Charles Claude Labillarderie d'Angeviller, "directeur-général des bâtiments du roi de France, jardins, manufactures et académies"; b. (?), d. 1810.

[3] Antoine de Malvin de Montazet; b. 1713, d. 1788. Nominated to

poet Ducis,[1] he had won from his contemporaries less admiration than respect.

Although, in her estimation, he occupied a far higher place than any of her other literary friends, Madame Necker had never been blind to those peculiarities of character which prevented the world from appreciating Thomas to the extent she thought he deserved.

The indifferent reception that his works so often met with she attributed to an excess of perfection in his nature which made it impossible for him to regard or describe anything from the point of view of ordinary mortals, and which again made him always aspire to reach a standard of moral excellence such as no human being could ever attain to. "For this reason," she once wrote, "his pure thoughts became severe, and his grand, majestic style perhaps too lofty." In her "Portrait" of him in the 'Mélanges,' drawn, she tells us, after the manner "of a bad artist who obtains his likenesses of lovely women from their habitual faults," Madame Necker represents Thomas as a recluse, "living alone in the midst of men, more austere in his ways than in his writings, intended rather to die like Regulus and Cato than to live in the eighteenth

succeed Cardinal de Tencin as Archbishop of Lyons in 1759, he had previously been Bishop of Autun and Almoner to the King.

[1] Jean François Ducis, poet and dramatic author. He translated and adapted to the requirements of the French stage many of the plays of Shakespeare. Among his most successful plays was "Abufar ou la famille Arabe," which was performed for the first time in 1795. Of obscure parentage, Ducis was born in 1733 and died about 1816.

century." But in spite of the life of extreme austerity to which he subjected himself, he was ever considered among those he admitted to his friendship a most genial and sympathetic companion. "The impartiality of his views, even more than his perfection of character," states Madame Necker, "generally make his society agreeable and pleasant, but if, even indirectly, you injure his pride, he becomes harsh in his answers, and misunderstands even those he is most fond of."

The writer concludes her description of her friend with a graceful reference to the affection and esteem he had always professed for her. "I have stated," she says, "that in taking his standard from himself he regarded everything from a lofty standpoint, the virtues, nature, men, and even his friend [herself]; for he believed he had discovered in her a soul worthy of his own, and certainly he would never be able to exaggerate the sentiments she feels for him."

After spending part of the autumn at Coppet, Thomas went direct from there to Nice, whither he had been encouraged to hope that Madame Necker would shortly follow him, since her husband had lately expressed a desire that she should try the effect on her health of the milder climate of the Riviera. In this expectation he was destined to be disappointed, however, for instead of proceeding thither, the Neckers set out for Avignon, where they remained for part of that November, and

then went on to winter at Montpellier in the Pyrenees.

Although, during his visit to Coppet, there had been nothing in his condition to lead Madame Necker to suspect that his end was approaching, within less than a year from this time Thomas had passed out of her life for ever. Early in the summer of 1785 he went with his sister to Oullins, near Lyons, in order to see Ducis, who was then residing there. Soon after his arrival Ducis became dangerously ill, and had it not been for the almost maternal care with which he was tended by Thomas would probably have succumbed. But his life had only been saved at the cost of his friend's, for after having successfully restored him to health, Thomas, whose delicate constitution had been unequal to the strain of weeks of constant nursing, himself began to decline and eventually, after a short illness, passed peacefully away on the 17th of September.

Shortly before he died Malvin de Montazet, Archbishop of Lyons, who had long been on terms of intimacy with him, hearing of his condition, had him brought from Oullins to a château he owned on the right bank of the Rhone so that he might personally give him, during those last days of his life, the spiritual consolation of which he stood in need.

Madame Necker's grief, on hearing of his death, was naturally intense and overwhelming, and was

rendered the greater not only because such an event had been quite unexpected, but because it removed for ever a conviction she had long held that she would predecease him.

If their friendship, which had never deviated from the path of strict propriety, had sometimes given their acquaintances cause for amusement, it had also been much respected and admired. Deep sympathy was therefore felt and expressed for Madame Necker in the irreparable loss she had sustained by the death of one "whose nobility of character had gained him the esteem of all."

"Gentle, modest, simple-minded, and virtuous," observes de Montazet, "with no other desires but those inspired by kind-heartedness, integrity, and learning, he was a type of writer rare at that time, who respected the public as well as himself, and who has never written a single sentence at which a conscience, however sensitive and austere, could possibly be offended. . . . He and Ducis were the two most honourable and veritably stoical men of letters of that corrupted age."

CHAPTER XIII.

Madame Necker's visit to Montpellier in December 1784 was undertaken with the object of consulting a physician of that town, named Bussière de Lamure,[1] who had acquired a great reputation for his successful treatment of nervous disorders similar to her own. To alleviate the frequent attacks of acute pain from which she was then suffering, he employed a form of narcotic which sometimes raised her "to a state of excessive vitality," and at others reduced her to one of complete exhaustion. This last condition, she thought, was not without a certain charm, since it left her with nothing more than just a consciousness of her existence, and being entirely painless produced a soothing effect upon her nerves. But although Lamure's method of combating her malady would appear to have afforded her some relief at that time, it does not seem to have been more than temporarily successful, for, on quitting Montpellier early in the following year, she did not return either to Paris or Saint Ouen, but retired to a country house

[1] François Bourguignon Bussière de Lamure ; b. 1717, d. 1787.

that her husband hired for her at Marolles, a small place on the outskirts of Fontainebleau. By this arrangement she was spared the fatigue of being obliged to receive her friends and acquaintances, which would have been almost inevitable had she gone back to Saint Ouen or the Rue Bergère, and, at the same time, since Marolles was situated at no great distance from the capital, Necker was enabled to keep in touch with political affairs, as he still desired to do.

The life of seclusion, which her precarious state of health had rendered for the time imperative, was often extremely trying to Madame Necker, since it cut her off from intercourse with every one except the members of her own family. "Never, since my early youth," she used to say, "have I lived in such solitude as this, and I cannot say that I appreciate it. At the beginning of our lives our imagination peoples everything; but at my age visions have disappeared, and retirement is then like Robinson's island, where, in order to be able to exist, you must entirely depend upon your own resources."[1] And again, the following passage from a letter to Moultou seems to belong to the same period: "Never more than at this time have I needed courage to support the weight of my existence, and it seems to me that my prolonged illness has already made me acquainted with eternity; but I must not com-

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker.

plain, living as I do in the bosom of friendship, that sweet compensation for my sufferings. In my present state, however, you must forgive me for feeling less enthusiasm with regard to the various matters which concern the lives of men: I prefer to live in the past rather than the future. My parents, for ever regretted, the friends I have always loved, and M. Necker, soul of my soul, these, I confess, are now my only affections."[1]

While her present situation entirely deprived her of the society of her friends, it at least afforded her ample opportunity to indulge, as she loved to do, "in the pleasures of retrospection."

During these months of enforced inactivity and idleness she gave herself up to reviewing the years she had spent in Paris, in the midst of that brilliant circle of notabilities in which she had long been such a prominent figure. It was now impossible for her to look back upon that period of her life without feeling disillusioned as to what she had formerly considered the advantages of social success, and profoundly grieved by the indifference for moral and religious principles which was shown by most members of smart society. "I cannot describe to you," she told one of her friends, "the impression that Paris makes upon me now; it is nothing more than an illusion, an imaginary world peopled with fantastic beings. Twenty years ago, if you remember, on finding myself for the first

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker.

time among the greatest intellects of Europe, I heard the ideas, upon which I had based my happiness, described as myths. Dearly did I cherish my own convictions amid that torrent of incredulity, . . . but this time it is I who am incredulous." For now, after twenty years' experience of the great world, she had come to realise the imperfections of human nature as exemplified by the selfishness and materialism of the age in which she lived. "The present and every one for himself," she remarks, "are the two mottoes of the century; . . . the future and a life for others are those which I should prefer to adopt."[1]

On reaching middle age she had begun to feel nothing but contempt for the sayings and doings of many of her acquaintances, whose lives seemed to her completely wasted in an atmosphere of indolence and superficiality. Wearied with defects which it was not in her power to remedy, she had long since turned for consolation to the spiritual life of the soul, for, by cultivating this, she hoped to prepare herself for a better world to come.

While his wife had thus become obliged, by reason of her bodily weakness, to lead a life of complete retirement, Necker had been employing his leisure in literary occupations, which had resulted in two important publications, entitled respectively 'Traité sur l'administration des finances' and 'L'importance des opinions religieuses.'

[1] Sainte Beuve, 'Causeries du Lundi.'

The first of these, which he had been urged to prepare by some of his wife's literary friends, resembled in certain respects the 'Compte Rendu' he had written in 1781, though it was a far more complete and extensive treatise on financial administration than its predecessor.

In this second 'Compte Rendu' Necker not only refuted the scathing criticisms and accusations of his opponents, but carefully demonstrated how effective his reforms would have been had he ever been allowed to complete them. While the cleverness with which he adduced, in support of his theories, an immense number of facts which had never been brought together before, and the remedies he proposed for a defective system of administration, undoubtedly made a very great impression upon public opinion, they cannot be said to have inspired so much appreciation for this work as had been accorded to the 'Compte Rendu' of 1781. But even so, the demand for it all over Europe was so great that in a short space of time no less than eighty-four thousand copies were sold.[1]

Of all those who read it no one thought more highly of it than Madame Necker. "I do not venture to say that his book contains the secret of the happiness of mankind," she said, "for that happiness depends upon itself alone and not upon

[1] In order to spare the feelings of some of his former colleagues, Necker had had this treatise printed and published out of France.

those who govern it; but it appears to me that it gives the secret of the least possible sorrow, and that is a great deal."

Necker's other literary venture, 'L'importance des opinions religieuses,' was a work of quite another description.

Convinced, as he had long been, of the evils that must ultimately spring from the atheistic doctrines of the philosophers, he now attempted to contest their arguments by showing the enormous advantages of religion, not only because of the stability it gives to the whole constitution of society, but by reason of the happiness and consolation it affords to private individuals.[1]

Although more than one champion of philosophy boldly endeavoured to point out the futility of his opinions, the success of his book remained unimpaired by these attacks, and so cordially was it received in the highest literary circles that its author was eventually rewarded with a prize from the Academy. He subsequently received from another quarter, however, an acknowledgment of its merits more gratifying even than this.

Shortly before his death at the beginning of 1788, Buffon, who had heard that Necker's last work had been much discussed and criticised, requested that the introduction to it might be read aloud to him. When this wish had been complied with, he directed his son to write Madame

[1] Sainte Beuve, 'Causeries du Lundi.'

Necker a letter begging her to inform her husband how great was the admiration he felt for what had been read to him. "From that moment," observes Sainte Beuve, "Buffon neither read nor wrote anything again, so that it was to the honour of M. Necker's book to have evoked from this great mind last words by which he shows the respect he feels for the idea of a Sovereign Being of Immortality."

During the remaining months of 1785 the Neckers were carefully making plans for an important event in the family circle which was arranged to take place in the following January. This was the marriage of their daughter to the Baron de Staël Holstein, Swedish Ambassador to the Court of France. Negotiations for the match, which had been on foot for nearly six years past, had long been impeded, partly because of their reluctance to part with their daughter so early in her life, and partly because of their objections to allowing her to become the wife of one who, it seemed far from probable, would ever permanently reside in France. For it was only in 1783 that M. de Staël, whose affairs had up to that time been in an extremely unsatisfactory condition, had at length reached the goal of his ambitions by obtaining the post which he now occupied.

Eric Magnus, Baron de Staël Holstein, was a man of distinguished birth though meagre fortune. Born in the province of Ostrogothia, in Central

Sweden, in 1749, he enlisted in the army at the age of thirteen, became lieutenant at eighteen, captain at twenty-three, and four years later was nominated chamberlain to the Queen Consort. At that time war had recently broken out between England and France in America, and de Staël, desiring to earn military distinction, petitioned the King to grant him leave to place his services at the disposal of the French army. With this request, however, Gustavus refused to comply, and the Baron having failed to gratify his ambitions in that direction, now sought to do so in another. Thus, shortly afterwards, he asked for and obtained the secretaryship of the Swedish Embassy in Paris, an appointment that had recently fallen vacant owing to the retirement of the Baron Malte-Ramel.

The King of Sweden's representative in France was at that time the popular and learned Comte de Creutz, to whom we have already alluded in a previous chapter. His assemblies were attended, as has been stated, by all the famous *beaux esprits* of the day, and a number of beautiful and distinguished women, such as the Maréchale de Luxembourg, the Duchesse de Lauzun, the Duchesse de Luynes, the Comtesse de la Marck, and Madame de Boufflers.[1]

[1] Marie Charlotte Hippolyte de Campet de Saujon, Comtesse de Boufflers, was the daughter of the Marquis de Saujon, a lieutenant of the king's bodyguard, and of Louise Angélique Barberin de Reignac, his wife. Born in 1725, she married, when twenty years

"Amiable, handsome, courtly, and well-educated," M. de Staël soon became a favourite with the latter, who had long been the intimate friend of his Royal master. It was largely due, indeed, to the ascendancy she exercised over Gustavus that he eventually obtained the diplomatic appointment which became the first and principal condition to his marriage with Germaine Necker.

Although in many respects a man of high principles and refined tastes, M. de Staël was the unfortunate possessor of a serious failing, which not only prevented him doing justice to his many good qualities, but which brought him more than once to the very verge of ruin. Owing to a lamentable disregard for the value of money, which he was accustomed to spend in a manner quite out of proportion to his slender means, he was continually becoming involved in financial difficulties which, but for the help of his friends, would certainly have proved fatal to his career. It was thus that, only a short time after he had taken up his secretarial duties at the Swedish Embassy in Paris, he suddenly found himself practically at the end of his resources, with scarcely anything

of age, Edouard, Comte de Boufflers-Rouverol, a soldier of distinction. M. de Boufflers died in 1764, and his wife shortly afterwards became lady-in-waiting to the Duchesse d'Orléans at the Palais Royal. While there she made the acquaintance of the Prince de Conti, with whom, as his mistress, she afterwards lived for many years at the Temple, where she maintained a literary salon frequented by such men as Rousseau, Grimm, and Hume. Surviving the Revolution, she died in great poverty about the year 1800.

left in the world to call his own. At this critical juncture the idea of contracting a marriage of convenience as the best means of extricating himself from an embarrassing situation first presented itself to his mind. What more natural, then, that he should at once fix his hopes upon Mademoiselle Necker, who had already come to be regarded in Parisian society as one of the richest heiresses in Europe?

He was already acquainted both with that young lady and her parents, for ever since his arrival in France he had constantly frequented the salon of Madame Necker, for whom he is said to have felt the highest regard. His relations with her husband, whose political aspirations he had ever warmly supported, were equally cordial. But although he had formed a fairly close connection with them both, M. de Staël did not at present venture to approach either M. or Madame Necker in the character of a prospective son-in-law. He wisely decided to open negotiations through a mutual friend, who would first ascertain for him in what spirit they would be likely to view such an alliance as he proposed. In accordance with this plan he placed himself unreservedly in the hands of Madame de Boufflers, who, being well known to Madame Necker, offered to undertake this delicate mission on his behalf. In the course of an interview which subsequently took place between the two ladies, Madame Necker informed

the Countess "that while she had no personal objections to M. de Staël, she could not at present consent to part with her daughter, or allow her to become the wife of a man who had no settled employment in France." Madame de Boufflers then assured her that there appeared good reason to believe that the King of Sweden intended shortly to nominate the Baron to a post which would establish him in Paris for some considerable time. Madame Necker was not satisfied with these assurances, however, and gave her visitor clearly to understand that she could not consent to give the matter further consideration until she received more positive proof that the Baron's expectations were fully justified.

Not altogether discouraged by her attitude towards his pretensions, M. de Staël not long afterwards went himself to see Madame Necker. On that occasion, after putting to him many searching questions with regard to his prospects, she again pointed out that she could not permit him to aspire to her daughter's hand without some sure guarantee that Gustavus really intended to promote him to some appointment which should permanently fix his residence in France.

After he had thus personally sounded Madame Necker, the Baron wrote and explained the whole situation of affairs to Gustavus, to whom he had already mentioned his matrimonial projects during a short visit he had recently paid to Stockholm.

In this, as in more than one of his previous communications to that Sovereign, he begged Gustavus to nominate him Ambassador to the French Court as soon as the Comte de Creutz retired. His candidature for a position of so much responsibility would have seemed unlikely to meet with the Royal approval, if only by reason of his extreme youth, had he not possessed certain claims to favourable consideration which it would have been impossible for Gustavus to overlook. Being well known and popular at Versailles, where he had become a favourite with the King and Queen, and a *persona grata* in the influential society of the literary salons, it was evident that his nomination would give more general satisfaction in Paris than that of any one else whom his Sovereign might choose to select. This had become more than ever apparent since Count Fersen, who had at one time hoped to succeed the Comte de Creutz, had lately gone to America to take part in the War of Independence, and in doing so had relinquished his claims to de Staël.

Gustavus was fully aware that few men were more entirely devoted to his service than the Baron, who, he felt convinced, could be relied upon to carry out his wishes with care and efficiency in whatever manner he might be called upon to do so. But in spite of these undeniable qualifications, his confidence in de Staël's ability was not at present so great as to make his Majesty desire to appoint him

Ambassador to one of the first States of Europe. It was doubtless for this reason that he declined at present to commit himself to any definite promises, and preferred to content the importunate Baron with assurances which, though not wholly unsatisfactory, gave the latter little reason to expect that his hopes would ever be realised. In adopting this attitude of discretion, however, the King of Sweden apparently did not reckon with the stubborn determination of de Staël's friends, who, seeing to what straits penury had now reduced him, were resolved to leave no stone unturned until they had obtained for him that post upon which his future so much depended. For while Madame de Boufflers continued, as heretofore, indefatigable in her efforts to secure his promotion, his chief, the Comte de Creutz, had also begun to manifest an interest in his affairs by making representations to Gustavus on his behalf. Finally, in the King and Queen of France he possessed two other powerful supporters who were soon to give him a signal proof of their friendship by interceding for him in the same quarter.

Yielding, perhaps, as much to these solicitations as to a genuine desire to put an end to de Staël's unfortunate position, Gustavus at length decided to effect a compromise, by which he believed that all further obstacles to the Baron's union with Mademoiselle Necker would finally be removed. Thus, instead of the appointment to which de Staël had

aspired, the King now promised him, upon the retirement of M. de Creutz, that of permanent adviser to the next Ambassador when in residence at the Embassy, and of Minister Plenipotentiary in his absence. This understanding was arrived at in 1782, and it appears to have so far satisfied the Neckers that they no longer raised any objections to the marriage, their consent to it being the more readily accorded since they had recently found by experience the difficulty of securing for their daughter a husband who fulfilled, both as regarded his character and position, their idea of an eligible son-in-law.[1]

During the next few months negotiations were entered into between Necker and the Baron with regard to settlements, and it was understood that Germaine's income should not be less than 500,000 livres a-year, so that the Embassy might be maintained upon a footing of suitable dignity. These financial arrangements, though not actually concluded, were already well advanced when, in the following February, the Comte de Creutz relinquished his diplomatic functions and returned to Sweden. Great, then, was the mortification of de Staël, who had expected at once to be placed in control of affairs, to find that not only had no steps been taken to confirm the appointment he had been promised, but that another candidate, whose name

[1] Other possible husbands for Germaine Necker are said, by various historians, to have been William Pitt the younger, Count Fersen, and Prince George Augustus of Mecklenburg, brother of Queen Charlotte.

had never been divulged, was about to supersede him. His position was now desperate. For on hearing that he had not been given the desired post, Necker at once declined to permit his daughter to marry a diplomat who appeared to have forfeited "both the confidence and goodwill of his Royal master." When this decision became known, the Baron's creditors, who by reason of the alliance he was about to contract had consented to defer their claims until after his marriage, once more reiterated their demands for immediate payment. His only hope now lay in the intervention of Louis Seize and Marie Antoinette, since they alone possessed sufficient influence to persuade Gustavus to confirm the promise he had made in the course of the preceding year. The reliance he placed upon their help was subsequently shown to have been well founded.

At this period of his reign the King of Sweden was studiously cultivating cordial relations with France, whose "moral and material support" he had the strongest reasons for desiring to win. Determined as he was to pursue this policy, it would have been on his part extremely impolitic to have opposed in any direction the wishes of the French Sovereigns, upon whose good offices he greatly depended to obtain the subsidies of which he stood so much in need.

It was, therefore, mainly in deference to their wishes that within a few weeks of the retirement of M. de Creutz he finally consented to fulfil his obliga-

Photo by *Frédéric Boissonnas, Geneva.*

THE BARON DE STAËL-HOLSTEIN.

By courtesy of the Proprietors of 'L'Art et les Artistes.

tions towards de Staël, whom he successively nominated Chargé d'Affaires, Minister Plenipotentiary, and Ambassador Extraordinary. But, as if through lack of confidence in the duration of an appointment which had been granted rather as a personal favour to the King and Queen of France than as a reward of the Baron's merits, Necker did not yet appear completely satisfied, and decided to make his consent to his daughter's marriage conditional upon the fulfilment of the following stipulations: That the King of Sweden should nominate the Baron de Staël Ambassador to France for life; that he should undertake to secure him an income of 25,000 francs, so that if, through unforeseen circumstances, M. de Staël should lose his appointment, he might still be suitably provided for; that His Majesty should confer upon him the Order of the Polar Star and the title of Count, in order that his wife might not be confounded in society with a certain undesirable Baronne de Stal; that the Swedish Ambassador should never take his wife to Sweden, except temporarily and with her own consent; and that Queen Marie Antoinette should personally express her desire for the marriage.[1]

The exacting nature of these conditions, many of which were difficult if not impossible to carry out, caused a further delay in the matrimonial negotiations, the conclusion of which appeared to be indefinitely postponed. Gustavus naturally felt some

[1] 'Revue des deux mondes,' Nov. 1, 1856.

reluctance in according so many favours to a man who had at present done little or nothing to earn them, and with the sole object of satisfying the private scruples of that nobleman's prospective father-in-law. He would doubtless have altogether rejected them had not Madame de Boufflers undertaken once more to act as intermediary between the parties concerned. During a visit which Gustavus paid to Paris a few months later she persuaded him to agree to the principal clauses of the contract, with the exception of those honours for which Necker had stipulated, and it was thus that at the beginning of October 1785 Germaine's parents felt justified at last in permitting her to give her hand to the Swedish Ambassador.

Scarcely is it to be wondered at that a union which had so obviously been regarded by the latter as a means of escape from financial embarrassment should not have proved altogether propitious.

The inclination for reckless extravagance that had involved the Baron in so many serious difficulties in the past continued to assert itself with alarming frequency after his marriage, and finally "compelled his wife to place herself under her father's protection" in order to safeguard the interests of herself and her children. It was this unfortunate propensity, quite as much as Germaine's spirit of domination, that eventually brought about their separation.

After her marriage, which was solemnised in the chapel of the Swedish Embassy on the 14th of

January 1786, Madame de Staël, according to a custom which prevailed at that period, returned for a few days to the house of her parents, and it was not until the following week that she rejoined her husband at the Embassy in the Rue du Bac, where, thanks to her father's liberality, their establishment was maintained for a time upon a footing of considerable splendour.[1]

The young Ambassadress, who was, of course, already well known in society, soon attracted to her assemblies many of the most distinguished people of the day, and in this way carried on a tradition that had been instituted by her husband's predecessor, the Comte de Creutz.

One of the principal events of that first year of her married life was her formal presentation to the King and Queen at Versailles.

The reception she met with from the ladies of the Court, though perfectly civil, was marked on that occasion by a complete absence of cordiality, an attitude which seems to have been attributable to the fact that she was the daughter of an ex-Minister who had had but few supporters among the members of the Royal household. The Queen, however, by an air of extreme graciousness, made ample amends for the frigid demeanour of her entourage. Having personally conspired to effect this match between her protégé, the Baron de Staël, and the heiress of Necker's enormous wealth, Marie Antoinette natur-

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

ally felt an especial interest in the young bride who was now for the first time presented to her. The ceremony was marked by an untoward incident which, but for her admirable tact, would certainly have proved extremely disconcerting to Madame de Staël. "At the moment," states M. d'Haussonville, "when she was about to make to the Queen the three obeisances required by etiquette, the trimming of her dress, which had been badly sewn on, came undone, and the confusion into which this little accident threw her caused her to omit one of her curtsies, probably the third, which was the most difficult, because in rising the person presented made as if to take up the hem of the Queen's dress and raise it to her lips. Since after her presentation she had to attend a big banquet of eighty people given in her honour, her embarrassment at the disorder of her Court gown was considerable. She would have found herself greatly incommoded by her hanging trimming had not the Queen kindly taken her to her private apartments, and while this was being readjusted by one of her tire-women, done her best, by a few words of sympathy, to help the young Ambassadress to recover her self-possession." [1]

This little contretemps afforded some amusement to the ladies of the Court, which a few days later was still further increased when they heard that Madame de Staël had been to pay a visit to the

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

Duchesse de Polignac and had left her hat in her carriage!

Notwithstanding the exigencies of her exalted position as the wife of the Representative of Sweden, Madame de Staël always arranged to pass several evenings of every week at her parents' house in the Rue Bergère, to which they had returned shortly before her marriage. She was at this time of the most valuable assistance to her mother in helping the latter to discharge her social obligations which, owing to declining health, Madame Necker had begun to find excessively fatiguing. Under these circumstances it was but fitting that the duty of receiving and entertaining that lady's still numerous acquaintances should devolve upon her daughter, who, being abundantly gifted with the qualities essential to such a position, fulfilled her task in such an extremely efficient manner that the celebrity of Madame Necker's *réunions* lost nothing by the change of mistress.

In addition to failing strength, however, other causes were responsible for Madame Necker's retirement from any active part in social life. During the past few years many of those men who had formerly frequented her house had died, and although a few, such as Morellet, Guibert, Saint Lambert, and Grimm still survived, their presence could do nothing to restore that literary atmosphere, the loss of which had contributed more than anything else to diminish her interest in her Tuesday and Friday

assemblies. For literary and philosophical discussions had now almost entirely given place to more momentous topics, which had once been entirely absent from the conversation.

The ever-changing aspect of political affairs had become a matter of absorbing interest, not only to the *habitués* of the Rue Bergère, but to those of every other influential salon in Paris. Intellectual conversations, seasoned with cleverly told anecdotes and brilliant repartee, were rapidly being exchanged for debates and dissertations conducted in a spirit of serious formality that was very different from the gay inconsequence of former days. For people no longer cared to waste time in discussing the latest society scandal, the newest poems and romances, or the last artistic masterpiece. Madame Necker, who had noticed this change with great regret, refers to it thus in a letter to one of her friends: "I have no literary news to give you, for that kind of conversation is no longer the fashion; the crisis is too great; people do not care to play chess on the edge of a precipice; our attention is entirely fixed on other things, and [literature] that flower of the imagination, last refuge of refinement and culture, is lost in our political discussions and is becoming a stranger to us."

CHAPTER XIV.

Since the moment of Necker's return to office was now approaching, it will be as well to cast a cursory glance at the various changes that had taken place at the Treasury since his retirement in 1781. The Administrations of his successors in that department had been characterised by extreme incompetence in the case of Joly de Fleury[1] and d'Ormesson,[2] and by fatal extravagance in that of Calonne.[3] Thanks to the favour of the Queen and the Comte d'Artois and to the influence of M. de Vergennes, Minister for Foreign Affairs, the latter had been nominated to the Contrôle-Général in 1783. His policy, which was adopted partly with a view to eclipse Necker's popularity with the masses, and partly in order to curry favour with the Court, was marked by profuse, not to say reckless, ex-

[1] Jean François Joly de Fleury; b. 1718, d. 1802. Succeeded Necker as Finance Minister, May 24, 1781, but retired from that position in March 1783.

[2] Henri François de Paule le Fèvre d'Ormesson; b. 1751, d. 1807. Succeeded Joly de Fleury at the Treasury, over the affairs of which he only presided for a few months and then retired.

[3] Charles Alexandre de Calonne; b. 1734, d. 1802. He had formerly been Avocat-Général au Conseil principal d'Artois; Procureur-Général au Parlement de Douay, and Maître des Requêtes.

penditure, which he declared "would be far more likely to promote the improvement of trade than the economical reforms which had been introduced by his predecessor." No sooner were the Kingdom's finances placed under the control of Calonne than he proceeded to satisfy the exorbitant demands of his friends at Versailles by lending them enormous sums of money or by restoring to them the pensions and emoluments that Necker had suppressed. But in addition to the pecuniary assistance with which he was ever ready to oblige the courtiers of Versailles, he also succeeded in extricating his patron, the Comte d'Artois, from considerable financial difficulties, and even found means to purchase the châteaux of Saint Cloud and Rambouillet for the King and Queen. No wonder that measures such as these should soon have earned him in Court circles the sobriquet of "The Model Minister"! It must be admitted, however, that Louise Seize, who had never been altogether blind to the shifty character of his Minister, gradually began to feel grave misgivings as he noticed the facility with which Calonne appeared able to satisfy even the most exacting demands upon the resources of the Treasury. At last, becoming apprehensive of serious consequences, the King decided to question him concerning the actual condition of financial affairs. Without committing himself to any definite statements, Calonne endeavoured to reassure his Majesty by informing him "that he had plans fully prepared

which he would put into operation at the proper time, the result of which would be to efface even the smallest trace of a deficit."

During this earlier period of his Administration he succeeded in keeping pace with this last "by means of loans, by realising certain sums of money due at a later date, and by introducing fresh taxation in every conceivable direction." But although these expedients sufficed for present requirements they were only temporarily effective, and Calonne was soon to find that he would have to adopt other and more drastic measures if he intended to postpone the day of reckoning.

Eventually, in face of serious complications, he was compelled to reveal his difficulties to the King, and to recommend to his Majesty a far-reaching scheme of reform, based upon the theories of Colbert, Turgot, and Necker. In order the more effectually to bring this scheme into operation, he persuaded Louis Seize to give his sanction to a step that his Majesty had long contemplated, namely, that of convening an Assembly of the Notables. Among other measures which Calonne desired to submit to the approval of that body were an equal distribution of taxes for all classes, the suppression of State privileges, the formation of Provincial Assemblies, and the abolition of excise duty and compulsory labour.

By the King's command the Notables assembled at Versailles on the 22nd of February 1787.

To the infinite mortification of Calonne, one of the first acts of that Assembly was to demand from him a full statement of accounts, showing the extent to which the deficit had risen since he had assumed office in 1783. No longer able to conceal the state of chaos into which the finances had been thrown —largely owing to his own mal-administration— he now admitted that the liabilities of the State had reached the total of about one hundred and twelve million francs. He declared, however, that this deficit had gradually been accumulating during the Ministries of his various predecessors, and that it had already arrived at seventy million francs at the time of Necker's retirement in 1781. Now it will be remembered that in the 'Compte Rendu' he had issued in that year Necker had shown a surplus of over ten million francs on the receipts, so that by Calonne's assertion he was credited with an error of no less than eighty million francs.

For a man of his integrity it was manifestly impossible to remain under the odium of such a charge as this without making every effort to clear himself, and he therefore prepared for publication a report in which he not only repudiated the statements of Calonne, in so far as they concerned himself, but explained, "with relentless exactitude," the defects of that Minister's financial policy. This 'Mémoire Justicatif,' as it was called, was published, however, against the King's wishes. For after Calonne, in his speech to the Notables, had ques-

tioned the accuracy of the 'Compte Rendu,' Louis Seize had intimated to Necker that his belief in the facts contained in that document still remained unshaken, and had earnestly requested him to pay no heed to the insinuations of his successor. His Majesty was therefore both surprised and annoyed when he learned that Necker, not content with the assurances he had given him, had ventured to publish a report to justify his own Administration and denounce that of Calonne. The King showed his displeasure at this act of indiscretion on the part of a former Minister by sending him, through the Baron de Breteuil,[1] an order to remove to a distance of forty leagues from Paris. This Royal command could scarcely have reached Necker at a more inopportune moment, since his wife, who would certainly not have permitted him to depart without her, was in no fit condition to undertake such a journey, and the delicate state of their daughter, at that time expecting her first child, made them both extremely reluctant to leave Paris. They prepared, however, to obey without demur, and in the course of the next few hours set out for the Château Renard, a country house situated some miles south of Fontainebleau and at the requisite distance from the capital. There they spent the next few weeks in an atmosphere of restful tranquillity which, in spite of the isolation it entailed, they found by no

[1] Louis Auguste Le Tonnelier, Baron de Breteuil, Minister of the King's household; b. 1733, d. 1807.

means unpleasant. Indeed, at the end of two months, when the order of exile was cancelled and they were free to return home once more, they even regretted that a sojourn "during which they had had to take the place of everything to one another" had so quickly come to an end. They had also become so much attached to Château Renard itself that, as Madame Necker afterwards informed one of her friends, they hoped, if circumstances permitted, to return there the following autumn "in order to bid a last farewell to a place of exile of which they would ever retain the pleasantest recollections." They now went back for a time to Marolles, where they were joined by Madame de Staël, who soon afterwards gave birth to a daughter. This event, though one of great rejoicing to the child's grandparents, appears at the same time to have occasioned Madame Necker a certain feeling of regret. For in a letter she wrote to Saint Lambert on the 19th of August we find the following words: "Your friendship, Monsieur, should console me for being a grandmother, and you almost succeed in making me forget it. As long as my heart is able to appreciate your attentions so highly, and as long as my mind can admire you, I am tempted to look upon time as a metaphysical being which has no real influence: I will not then believe either in your age or my own; in nature I see but two things—living and dying. My religious convictions have eliminated half these, so that if my granddaughter is fortunate

enough to think as I do, there will not be such a great difference of age between us; for there is nothing that makes people more contemporary than eternity."

While Madame Necker was spending the summer of 1787 with her family at Marolles, political events at Versailles were gradually paving the way for her husband's recall to the Treasury. At the end of April Calonne had been dismissed and replaced by Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse,[1] who was nominated "Chef du Conseil des Finances" on the 1st of May. Although public opinion had seemed to demand that Necker should succeed Calonne as Finance Minister, the King, in appointing Loménie de Brienne, had allowed his decision to be influenced by the wishes of the Queen, who particularly desired that he should nominate the Archbishop.

By nature "vacillating and uncertain, without other talents than those of intrigue," Loménie de Brienne appeared to centre all his energies, during his short Administration, in acquiring honours and riches for himself. As soon as he was placed in control of the finances, he proceeded to exchange the See of Toulouse for the more lucrative Archbishopric of Sens, and took possession of the rev-

[1] Etienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne; b. 1734, d. 1794. Before his appointment to this office he had been respectively Grand Vicaire to the Archbishop of Rouen (1752); Conclavist to Cardinal de Luynes at the time of the election of Pope Clement XIII. (1758); and Bishop of Condom (1760).

enues of the abbeys of Corbie and Saint Ouen, although the income he obtained from other sources already exceeded seven hundred thousand livres a-year. While he had long been scheming to obtain the position he now occupied, he had neglected to form any definite line of policy if he should ever succeed in doing so. For want of a better model, therefore, his Ministry differed little from that of Calonne, though previous to his own appointment he had figured among that Minister's political opponents.

Inclined at first to show confidence in his ability, the Notables seemed ready to further the measures he recommended to them. They accordingly assented to a loan of sixty million livres that he proposed to raise, expecting to repay the greater part of that amount by introducing extensive economies in the Royal households. But with regard to projects of fresh taxation, such, for instance, as the "Subvention Territoriale," he met with less success, the Assembly refusing to vote for them except by direct command of the King. After a sitting which had lasted for exactly three months, the Notables rose on the 25th of May. No other remarkable result had been achieved by their labours than a growing inclination on the part of the public to regard the intentions of the Government with suspicion.

Towards the end of July, in view of a condition of affairs which was daily becoming more critical, Parliament advised the King to summon the States

General without delay, but this, on account of the opposition of the Court, he at present declined to do. In August matters assumed a more threatening aspect when the "Édit du Timbre" and that of "Subvention Territoriale" were registered at a "Bed of Justice" at Versailles and immediately afterwards declared by Parliament null and void. Exasperated by such a bold and unexpected move on the part of a body of men whom he had thought entirely subservient to his authority, the Archbishop retaliated by ordering their immediate exile to Troyes.

During the next few weeks popular excitement became so great in Paris that the King, for the sake of greater security, decided "to place his authority in the hands of Brienne," who, "alleging the necessity of concentrating power in order to dominate the situation, had himself nominated 'principal Ministre.'"

In the meantime the financial outlook remained as menacing as ever. Failing to reduce the deficit by means of heavier taxation or economical reforms, the Archbishop was once more obliged to resort to loans. He laid before Parliament, with which he had previously come to terms and recalled from Troyes, a gigantic scheme for obtaining annual subsidies until 1792, in which year he promised to summon the States General. The Magistrates declined to vote for the carrying out of this scheme in its entirety, however, and only consented to

adopt his proposals with regard to a contract of loans for the next two years on the understanding that the States General should be summoned at the end of that time. While these negotiations were actually proceeding, at a moment, therefore, when his presence in the Ministry could ill be spared, the Archbishop fell ill, and for some time afterwards was unable to give his attention to affairs of State. This occurred in December 1787, so that at the beginning of the following year no perceptible improvement had been effected in any direction whatever. In Paris a feeling of intense anxiety had entered the public mind consequent upon the fall in value of Royal securities, the non-payment of rents, and the rumour that the loans for which Parliament had voted were unobtainable. In every mouth the word "bankruptcy" was continually pronounced, and the Court, which was primarily held responsible for this, became an object of greater hatred than ever. On all sides were heard demands for the convocation of the States General, and at prominent points throughout the city were to be seen placards "threatening a general revolt" if that did not speedily take place. At last, on the 5th of July, Loménie de Brienne, realising the imminence of what might prove to be an irremediable disaster, issued an order "inviting Provincial Assemblies, Municipalities, Academies, and private persons to communicate to the Ministry 'all the information they could

discover relative to the convocation, composition, and formation of the States General.'" He appears to have taken this step less with a view of eventually summoning that body than in order to calm popular agitation, and intended, if possible, to devise some other means of dealing with the situation; it was even asserted in some quarters that as soon as the storm had abated he meant to put everything back on the old footing once more. He had lately proceeded some distance in that direction by introducing a whole series of arbitrary measures with the object of restricting the powers of the Magistracy. So violent was the animosity aroused by these throughout the country that the King, fearing more serious developments, decided to summon the States General on the 1st of May 1789. This act on the part of the Sovereign was tantamount to an open admission that Loménie de Brienne had reached the end of his resources and had been abandoned by the Court. Such was, in fact, the case. Reluctant, however, to retire from the Ministry until no other course was left open to him, the Archbishop made one last bid for power by proposing to Necker that he should resume control of the finances under his, the Archbishop's, direction. Necker, having no desire to become "the subordinate of an unpopular Minister," declined to accept such a post unless he should be given complete and unrestricted liberty of action and a seat at the Council of State. Un-

willing to agree to such terms as these, Loménie de Brienne sent in his resignation on the 25th of August 1788.

The next day Necker was nominated Director-General of Finances, with a seat at the Council of State. Since it was hoped that his well-known business capacity would at once put an end to the financial crisis, and that his liberal views on social reform would ensure, on the part of the Government, a more conciliatory attitude towards the rights of the people, the news of his appointment was received with universal rejoicing throughout the country. At Court, however, it was looked upon with far less favour. The King, obsessed with "hereditary prejudices antagonistic to the spirit of the age," had reluctantly consented to nominate him in deference to the insistent demands of his subjects, who, he felt convinced, would soon regret their choice, while the Queen regarded his recall "as a measure involving a sacrifice of kingly dignity much to be regretted." The courtiers, who well remembered how he had formerly remained deaf to every request for "place, privilege, or money," expressed unstinted disgust at his reappointment.

On his return to the Treasury in the summer of 1788, Necker had an infinitely harder task before him than at the time of his first Ministry. During the intervening years the debts of the State had been constantly accumulating until they had now

reached an almost irreducible figure; credit was at a standstill, and after a harvest, devastated by hailstorms, great scarcity of bread prevailed in Paris. Since the law courts had sunk to a state of semi-inactivity, "crime went unpunished and licence unchecked"; while a danger of a still more perilous character seemed to threaten the country from the fact that order and discipline had begun to desert the army. Finally, there appeared to be no further means of either raising loans or of imposing fresh taxation in any direction whatever.

A state of affairs such as this would have been enough to dishearten a statesman possessing far more experience and ability than Necker, and he, being in no wise deceived by false hopes, resumed his official duties with the feeling that it was now too late to remedy the mistakes which had been committed since his retirement in 1781. "Would to God," he said to one of his friends, "they had given me the last seventeen months; things are now gone too far."[1]

Nevertheless, for nearly a year he succeeded in triumphing over almost insurmountable obstacles. So great was the confidence inspired by his integrity that capitalists who had declined to assist his predecessors at once placed funds at his disposal. The attorneys of Paris alone advanced no less a sum than six million livres, and these, together with the two millions he contributed from his own fortune,

[1] Maria Norris, 'The Life and Times of Madame de Staël.'

enabled him to meet the most pressing claims upon the public purse.

But although his vast experience of business affairs was now of invaluable assistance to him, his lack of statesmanship made him quite incompetent to deal with the political situation. In controlling this he appears ever to have displayed throughout his last Administrations a fatal want of firmness and resolution which made it impossible for him to pursue a steady or definite course of action such as might have exercised a restraining influence over public opinion.[1]

During the eight months between his appointment and the Convocation of the States General in the following May, he spent much time, in the intervals of negotiating contracts of grain for the capital, in ascertaining details relative to the formation of the "Tiers État." His object in making these inquiries was to determine what form of representation was to be allowed to that body;

[1] Necker's habitual uncertainty when faced with an emergency is thus referred to by one who knew him intimately: "Son esprit avait l'habitude de considérer toutes les faces d'une affaire avec tant d'exactitude et de réflexion, sa prévoyance était tellement susceptible et tellement scrupuleuse qu'il n'était plus frappé, dans les circonstances même les plus pressantes, que des difficultés d'une décision quelconque, et ne se déterminait, pour ainsi dire, que forcément à vouloir ce qu'il voulait. Prendre un parti sans un motif qui fût à ses yeux de la dernière evidence, semblait un effort au-dessus de son pouvoir, quelquefois même pour les petites choses comme pour les grandes. Je lui ai moi-même entendu raconter que, durant les premières années de son séjour à Paris, il lui était arrivé cent fois de rester plus d'un quart d'heure dans son fiacre avant de parvenir à se décider sur la maison où il devait se faire conduire."—Sainte Beuve, 'Causeries du Lundi.'

whether, as had been the case in 1614, it should be numerically the same as each of the privileged orders, namely, the aristocracy and the clergy, or that it should have a representation equal to the other two orders put together.

This question which, had he urged it, could have been settled at once by an order in Council, he preferred to submit to the votes of the Notables who were reassembled for that purpose at the beginning of November. After some deliberation they rejected the double representation of the Tiers by a hundred and twelve votes to thirty-three. But in spite of this decision Necker, who knew that the lower orders imperatively demanded it, recommended the King to concur with their wishes. Louis Seize, supported by the Queen's approval, consented to do so, and this important concession to the wishes of the people was finally ratified by an order in Council on the 27th of December. The discussions to which it had given rise had been so protracted, however, that in the meantime public animosity towards the Government had begun to constitute an element of danger which, had Necker shown less indecision, need not then have assumed such a threatening aspect.

A little later he again showed the same hesitation towards a matter of almost greater consequence, namely, the composition of that powerful legislative body which had now been called into existence. Since "the destiny of France" was to be placed in

the hands of the Tiers, it was a matter of the utmost importance "to select representatives from those classes whose interest in their own property would prevent them from violating that of others — deputies, in fact, who would neither hold advanced democratic opinions nor be hostile to the Royal authority." By neglecting this detail he was not only "exposing the fortunes of the State to the gravest risks," but was incurring responsibility for subsequent disasters. There were still, however, other important questions to be decided before the actual assembling of the States General, and these, had he chosen to exercise that authority, Necker had full power to settle on his initiative. But owing, as it appears, to a divergency of opinion on the part of his colleagues he imprudently left them to the discretion of the Assembly itself. These points mainly concerned the manner in which the three estates should assemble and vote: that is to say, whether, when convened, they should meet in one body or separately, in three different chambers, and again, "whether they should vote by heads or by orders." These very questions, it will be recalled, afterwards became the cause of violent dissensions among the deputies, which culminated in the setting up of a National Assembly, and thus became indirectly the cause of the Revolution itself.

The States General was opened by the King at Versailles on the 5th of May 1789. Before nine o'clock in the morning of that day every seat and gallery

in the Assembly Hall to which the general public was allowed access had been appropriated by a throng of over two thousand spectators. A little later, Ministers, Ecclesiastics, Governors, Lieutenant-Generals of provinces, and deputies chosen to represent the three orders, began to arrive and were marshalled to their allotted places by the Marquis de Dreux-Brézé, Grand Master of the Ceremonies, assisted by a numerous staff.

Among the former was Necker, easily distinguishable as the only member of the Ministry in unofficial dress—a town costume of cinnamon and gold, richly embroidered with "paillettes." His entry was heralded by a tremendous outburst of cheering which testified to the immense popularity he still enjoyed, and which "profoundly affected" Madame de Staël, who was seated in one of the galleries.

When all had assembled word was sent to the King, who soon afterwards entered, attended by a brilliant escort. As soon as he appeared all present rose to their feet and greeted him with cries of "Vive le roi!" and prolonged clapping. After the applause had subsided Louis Seize began with much dignity to read his address, the moderate and paternal tone of which gave rise, from time to time, to enthusiastic exclamations of approval from his audience. The Royal address was followed by a speech from the Keeper of the Seals touching upon such questions as "The Liberty of the Press," "The Precautions to be taken for Public Security,"

and "The Reforms that were needed for Criminal Legislation." As soon as this was concluded Necker rose and began to read an exhaustive report which he had prepared with great care and which contained a multiplicity of financial statistics, "difficult to follow," still harder to remember, but only the most indefinite recommendations with regard to a future course of action. Constant references he made, indeed, to the immensity of the task which lay before the States General, but scarcely mentioned "those fundamental principles which, in the midst of such grave circumstances, should have occupied" their exclusive attention. After speaking for nearly three hours he began to find that his voice was unequal to further strain, and therefore handed over the remainder of his report to the Secretary of the Royal Agricultural Society, who concluded it in clear, sonorous tones, distinctly audible in every part of the building.

Most of the deputies, as well as the general public, wearied with listening to complicated details of which they were unable to retain the half, began to lose interest in the Director-General's speech long before it was ended, and the disappointing impression it left upon their minds did much to lessen the confidence they had previously felt in his ability and resourcefulness. Nevertheless, at the end of the proceedings he was greeted with cheers not less hearty than those which had marked his arrival at the Assembly Hall earlier in the day.

After the States General had thus been formally opened by the King there seemed in the minds of some to be good reason to expect that much good would result from their subsequent deliberations. But these sanguine hopes were soon fated to be disappointed.

Instead of devoting themselves exclusively to national interests, the deputies wasted the first few weeks of the session in heated discussions concerning those very questions that Necker had omitted to decide before they came together.

The nobility and clergy at first entirely refused to act in common with the Tiers, which, becoming exasperated by their uncompromising attitude, assumed the title of National Assembly on the 17th of June, and the right to enforce whatever legislative measures it considered advisable.[1]

It was because of this sudden assumption of supreme power on the part of the Commons that the King was now advised to hold a "Séance Royal," at which he should mediate between the opposing parties by deciding once and for all the vexed question of votes. Pending the fulfilment of that object, the "Salle des Menus Plaisirs," in which the Tiers had recently been wont to assemble, was closed by the King's command on the plea that it was required for another purpose, but really in

[1] The Tiers based its claim to this authority upon the assumption that it was more representative of the different classes of the nation than the two higher denominations.

order to prevent that section of the States General from holding further meetings before the séance took place. For the Court had become alarmed by the bold and independent action that had been taken by the members of the Third Estate, and was determined to hold them in check as long as possible. But no sooner had they been evicted from the "Salle des Menus" than they reassembled in the Royal tennis court, and there, on the motion of Bailly,[1] their president, "they took a solemn oath never to separate until they had established a constitution for their country."

Their deliberations were again interrupted, however—this time by a messenger from the Comte d'Artois, who came to inform them that since his Royal Highness intended to use the tennis court on the following day, it would no longer be available as a place of assembly. Once more, therefore, they were compelled to seek new quarters elsewhere, and they now selected as a meeting-place the church of Saint Louis. In this they were soon joined by many of the deputies of the clergy.

While these events were taking place Necker had been preparing at the Contrôle-Général[2] an Act which the King was to read to the States on the

[1] Jean Sylvain Bailly, first Mayor of Paris ; b. 1736, d. 1793. Doyen of the Third Estate in the States General, he was afterwards elected President of the Constituent Assembly.

[2] The General Control Office had previously been transferred from Paris to Versailles, and at this time formed part of the buildings of the Palace itself.

23rd of June. The principal clauses of this Act stipulated "that the three orders should deliberate together on general affairs, but separately when discussing honorary privileges and rights appertaining to lands and fiefs; that the King would never authorise the establishment of a legislative body formed by a single chamber, and that he would reserve to himself, as far as concerned the army, entire executive authority."

Although just and impartial to all parties, this declaration met with the strongest opposition at Court, where it was considered far too conciliatory towards the "Tiers."

After it had been submitted to the King it was therefore handed over with his consent to a secret committee of Ministers, who so entirely changed its character that when at length its terms were announced they bore scarcely any resemblance to those that had been drawn up by Necker.

At the Séance Royale—the last ceremony that Louis Seize was to attend in State—the King was accompanied by a brilliant suite, which was purposely given a military character in order to emphasise the prerogatives of the Throne and to overawe the Commons who had dared to encroach upon them. Further, no efforts were spared to subject the latter to every kind of humiliation. For, after they had been kept waiting for some time in drenching rain outside the "Hôtel des États," they found, when at last they were per-

mitted to enter the building, that their places had already been appropriated by the nobility and clergy. The resentment they felt at this treatment was afterwards by no means dispelled by the conditions contained in the Royal address.

The King informed them that they were to vote separately, according to their orders; that the measures passed by the National Assembly were to be considered invalid; and that the feudal rights which that body had attempted to suppress must be maintained as inviolable properties. The concessions were chiefly confined to the abolition of tax privileges, but that only *if those who held such privileges were ready to relinquish them;* the restriction of game laws; regular enrolling to be substituted for the practice of drawing lots for the militia; suppression of compulsory labour and Mortmain; the organisation of Provincial Estates and the convocation of the States General at stated intervals of time. At the conclusion of his speech Louis Seize peremptorily ordered the States to disperse forthwith, bidding them reassemble on the following morning "in the rooms assigned to their several orders, and there to continue to hold their séances."

Great was the indignation of the Commons on hearing this sentence of arbitrary dismissal, and their feelings found vent in sullen silence when, a few moments later, the King and his Court de-

parted. Moreover, they did not accompany their colleagues, who, in obedience to the King's injunctions, now left the Assembly Hall, but remained behind, together with a certain number of the clergy.

After a while the Marquis de Brézé, Master of Ceremonies, re-entered, and, seeing them still seated in their places, said significantly: "Gentlemen, you have heard the King's orders!"

To these words Mirabeau, acting spokesman for the rest, returned a fulminating reply, in which he informed de Brézé that he no longer had authority to dismiss them, and directed him to return and "tell those who had sent him that they (the representatives of the Third Estate) were there by the will of the people, and that nothing but the force of bayonets should ever dislodge them." Disconcerted by this air of determined resistance, the Marquis was then reluctantly obliged to retire. The Tiers and those members of the clergy who had joined them afterwards proceeded to show their indifference to the King's commands by reassuming the powers of a National Assembly and by confirming the measures they had previously passed, and having declared themselves inviolable, they "denounced as a traitor, guilty of a capital crime, whosoever should attempt to coerce them."[1]

In the meantime the King, who had been informed of what had taken place at the Hôtel des

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

États after he had left it, was beginning to realise that the Séance Royale, far from promoting the favourable results he had anticipated, had but increased the hostility of the Commons towards the Government. Perceiving the necessity of coming to terms with them as soon as possible, he decided to summon Necker and confer with him as to the best means of doing so without unduly compromising the dignity of the Crown.

Now Necker's position at this juncture was an extremely embarrassing one.

Although, in the first instance, he had recommended Louis Seize to hold a Royal Sitting, he had only done so on the understanding that his Majesty would read at that ceremony the Act that he himself had drawn up. He was afterwards, of course, entirely opposed to the terms of the Act prepared at the secret Committee of Ministers in direct contravention to the advice he himself had tendered to the Sovereign. His disapproval of the terms of that document made it difficult, if not impossible, for him to attend the Séance, for, if he had done so, he would have appeared in the eyes of the people to be giving his support to measures for which in reality he was in no sense responsible.

Owing to the indifference with which his recommendations had lately been received, his position had become so humiliating that he had fully intended to resign his post, and had even expressed to the King his desire to do so.

But although his Majesty had as yet come to no decision with regard to this matter, Necker's absence from the Royal Sitting had given rise to rumours that he had been dismissed, and these had tended to make the conditions of the Royal Speech the more distasteful to the Commons.[1]

Necker had been prudent enough, however, to tell no one of his intended retirement, and at the moment when he was informed that the Séance was about to take place had pleaded indisposition as an excuse for not attending it. When, therefore, he received the Royal summons he was still ignorant of the King's intentions concerning himself, but was expecting to hear that his Majesty had decided to permit him to relinquish his functions. Instead of doing so, however, Louis Seize now earnestly begged him to retain office, declaring that by this means alone could tranquillity be maintained throughout the country.

His audience took place between six and eight o'clock in the evening, and lasted for upwards of an hour. While it was proceeding the populace, unchecked by the sentries on guard, burst into the courtyard of the palace, and, congregating beneath the very windows of the Royal apartments, began

[1] Criticising Necker's attitude on this occasion, Marmontel observes: ". . . sa conduite a fait dire aux uns qu'il avait voulu attirer à lui seul la faveur du peuple ; aux autres qu'il avait donné le signal de la rébellion ; et aux plus modérés, qu'uniquement occupé de sa reputation il avait tout sacrifié à son intérêt personnel."—'Mémoires de Marmontel,' vol. ii.

to shout "that the King had been deceived by his advisers, and that Necker (who it was supposed had been dismissed) should at once be restored to the Ministry." These cries, interspersed from time to time with infamous threats aimed at the Polignacs, the Comte d'Artois, and even the Queen herself, were often distinctly audible in the room where Necker remained closeted with the King, and probably influenced not a little the latter's desire to win the approval of his subjects by retaining the services of their favourite Minister. The Court, however, had decided otherwise; and at that very moment men, who had viewed with disgust Necker's policy of moderation towards the Tiers, were plotting to bring about his dismissal at the earliest possible opportunity. On leaving the Royal Presence he quitted the Palace by a door giving access to the main courtyard, in which townspeople and others were waiting to hear the result of his audience. Learning that he had decided to remain in office by his Majesty's express desire, they bore him off in triumph to the offices of the Contrôle-Générale, cheering him unceasingly the while. When he arrived there he was received by the members of the National Assembly, who had come in a body to beg him not to resign. He informed them that although he had now abandoned all intention of doing so, he feared "that alone and unaided he no longer possessed the power to do any good." To these words one of the deputies

replied by assuring him that there were no efforts, or even sacrifices, that he and his colleagues were not prepared to make in order to assist him.[1]

In absenting himself from the Séance Royale Necker had enormously increased his popularity with the lower classes, who now placed great hopes upon his influence to effect "a favourable understanding between the States General and the Government."

Supported by so large a majority of the nation, he should have taken immediate advantage of his power to warn the King of the "dangers to which his reckless advisers were exposing the Throne and the State," and have urged his Majesty to dismiss those Ministers who had been responsible for the disastrous declaration of the 23rd of June.

In his anxiety to propitiate all parties, however, he did not do so, and "contented himself" with recommending the King to order the union of the three orders "as the only means of calming popular excitement and of fulfilling his personal inclinations."

Desirous as ever to do what was best for the "public good," Louis Seize now gave his unconditional assent to this important step: accordingly, with the concurrence of the clergy, though not without some resistance on the part of the nobility, the three orders were finally united on the 27th of the month.

In the meantime Necker's enemies were quickly

[1] Mémoires de Marmontel.

maturing their plans for removing him from the Ministry. Profiting by a lull in the storm of popular agitation, which had resulted from his continuance in office, certain of the courtiers were secretly taking steps to invest Paris and Versailles with a force of thirty thousand men under the Maréchal de Broglie. When these military preparations were sufficiently far advanced they no longer attempted to disguise from the Director-General their intention to overthrow him. On the 10th of July he was publicly insulted by the Comte d'Artois while on his way to attend a meeting of the Council of State, and on the following day he received an order from the King bidding him leave France "secretly and at once." Not content with having secured the Sovereign's consent to his dismissal, some of his opponents had urged his Majesty to give orders for his removal to the Bastille, as a necessary measure of precaution against an attempt on the part of the populace to prevent his departure. To this project of forcibly detaining M. Necker, however, the King entirely declined to agree, and himself undertook to become responsible for his leaving the country as quietly and expeditiously as possible. The confidence which Louis Seize reposed in the loyalty of his late Minister proved to be fully justified, for, as we shall now see, nothing could have been more discreet than the manner in which Necker carried out the Royal commands to the letter. The order

of exile was brought to him by the Minister of Marine at three o'clock in the afternoon of the 11th of July, just at the moment when he was about to sit down to dinner, in company with his wife and daughter and several friends. He read the document with his usual air of impassivity, sat down once more and "continued to talk freely to his guests" without betraying, either by word or look, the purport of the message he had just received.

After dinner, complaining of a slight headache, he asked his wife to accompany him for a turn in the open air. A few minutes later they entered their carriage with the apparent intention of going for their customary evening drive, and it was only after they had reached the open country and had taken the Brussels road that Madame Necker was informed by her husband of what had occurred. The shock of such an announcement, however carefully imparted, cannot fail to have greatly affected her, seeing how intensely distressed she had felt at her husband's first resignation. But her grief at this new reverse was probably not a little mitigated by the fact that instead of leaving her at Versailles in ignorance of his movements, a course which, in accordance with the King's wishes, he might well have adopted, Necker had not only told her of his dismissal before any one else, but had allowed her to accompany him into exile. And again, the consolation she derived from these

circumstances doubtless enabled her to regard "the inconveniences of a long journey without a female attendant or even a travelling dress" as details of comparative unimportance.

Meanwhile the long summer evening was beginning to close in, and the travellers had already left Versailles, with its atmosphere of political unrest, many miles behind them. So rapidly were they speeding on their way, indeed, that two mounted officers of the King's Guard, who had been ordered to follow them in disguise and not to lose sight of Necker until he had actually crossed the frontier, found some difficulty in keeping up with the carriage.[1]

Owing to the suddenness of his departure from the Contrôle-Général, Necker had been unable to provide either himself or his wife with the necessary passports; but until they reached Valenciennes no difficulties were met with on this account. There, however, they were refused permission to proceed further without the usual credentials, and fearing lest he might be indefinitely detained unless he explained his mission, Necker now produced the King's letter, and showed it to the Military Governor of the town. As soon as he read it that officer at once gave him leave to depart, though not without expressing his deep concern at "the irreparable evils which he foresaw

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

that the ex-Minister's departure would produce in France." [1]

The remaining stages of the journey to Brussels were marked by no other untoward incident. On arriving in that city, Madame Necker, worn out with fatigue, retired for a few hours' repose at the hostelry at which they had alighted, but her husband, intent on reaching Coppet as soon as possible, went on later in the day.

Brief though his halt at Brussels must certainly have been, he nevertheless found time while there to give proof in the following manner of his disinterested feelings towards the country he had lately quitted.

"Fearing that the news of his dismissal might prevent the despatch" of a large supply of grain which he had lately ordered from Messrs Hope of Amsterdam to relieve the bread famine in Paris, he wrote to inform the head of that firm that the contract he had made with him still held good, and that the two millions from his private fortune which he had deposited "at the Treasury were answerable for its fulfilment." [2]

Soon after he had despatched this letter, and had made arrangements for his wife's comfort, he resumed his journey. In order to avoid the conjectures and comments that his sudden arrival in

[1] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'
[2] Ibid. Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

the German States would otherwise almost certainly have occasioned, he travelled as far as Basle under an assumed name. Reaching that place on the 20th of July, in company with his son-in-law, who had joined him not long after he left Brussels, he put up at the old posting-house of "The Three Kings." Here, by a curious coincidence, he met the Duchesse de Polignac, the intimate friend of Marie Antoinette, who, as one of his greatest opponents at Versailles, had latterly done much to undermine his influence with the King and Queen. For many months past they had mutually regarded one another with feelings of the greatest distrust, which were due to a deep-rooted conviction in the mind of each that the other was responsible for the bankruptcy and ruin that seemed about to overwhelm the Kingdom. Their relations had therefore been of the coldest possible description.

In his curiosity, however, to hear what events had taken place in Paris since his departure from Versailles, nine days before, Necker forgot his personal aversion to Madame de Polignac, and listened with interest to the news she imparted to him. It was thus that he now heard for the first time of the fall of the Bastille on the 14th of July, and of the subsequent flight of the Comte d'Artois and of many of the nobles of the Court, including her husband and herself.

Three days after his arrival at Basle, Necker was

rejoined by his wife and daughter. Madame de Staël, having received from her father, on the 12th of July, a letter in which he informed her of his dismissal, and of his intention to proceed to Coppet, had set out thither without an instant's delay, and thus arrived at Basle on the same day as her mother, who she found still wearing the same full dress, though now covered with dust, in which she had presided at her dinner-party at Versailles.[1]

Shortly before his daughter's arrival Necker had received an urgent summons which not only made him abandon all further idea of going on to Coppet, but impelled him to return to France in the course of the next few hours. For a messenger[2] sent post-haste by the National Assembly had arrived at "The Three Kings," bringing with him an autograph letter from Louis Seize, earnestly begging him to return immediately to Versailles, and take up his duties as Director-General once more.

[1] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'

[2] Dufresne de Saint Léon, Necker's former chief clerk at the Treasury.

CHAPTER XV.

When Necker's dismissal was proclaimed in Paris on the 12th of July it gave rise, as on the occasion of his first retirement in 1781, to the greatest consternation among the inhabitants, who, on the departure of the only man they considered capable of directing affairs, "expected to see the city overwhelmed by famine, bankruptcy, and civil war."

Theatres were closed as a sign of popular mourning; streets were barricaded, and on every hand were to be seen men and women wearing green cockades "in honour of the dismissed Minister whose liveries were of that colour."[1]

His bust in wax, which, with that of the Duc d'Orléans and other celebrated men, was being exhibited in the "Cabinet de Curtius," was seized by the mob, draped with crêpe, and paraded in triumph through the "grands boulevards" to the Place Vendôme. There the procession was stopped

[1] It will be remembered that the green cockade was adopted that day at the suggestion of Camille Desmoulins, who, while addressing the mob at the Palais Royal, snatched a leaf from a tree in the gardens and attached it to his hat.

and dispersed by a detachment of soldiers, and the bust destroyed.[1]

The following day the deputies of the National Assembly openly declared that Necker "had departed, taking with him their regrets and esteem," and on the 15th of July they passed a motion requesting the King to consent to his recall.

Few, perhaps, either among the members of the legislature or the general public, suspected what were the Controller-General's own views with regard to his dismissal.

There seems to be no doubt that since the events of the past few months had convinced him that he could no longer do justice to the appointment he held, he had relinquished it with resignation, if not with thankfulness. For although his policy had enjoyed the approval of a considerable number of the deputies, it had constantly been opposed by his fellow-Ministers and by an influential party at Versailles. The latter had successfully frustrated all his efforts to effect a satisfactory understanding between the National Assembly and the Government, and had finally accomplished his downfall. It was the remembrance of this relentless opposition, in addition to the enormous difficulties of the task he had undertaken, that turned whatever disappointment he may have felt into relief at

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.' Chamfort, 'Pensées, Maximes, Anecdotes.'

being freed from a position that had become well-nigh intolerable. He had quitted Versailles with a sense of having performed his duty to the best of his ability, and with the assurance that he was carrying away with him into exile the regrets of more than two-thirds of the nation, and such reflections as these had made it possible for him to look forward to a life of retirement in the peaceful surroundings of his home at Coppet with feelings of pleasurable anticipation. The arrival, therefore, of Dufresne de Saint Léon with the King's letter of recall, when he was almost in sight of the haven he desired to reach, undoubtedly came as somewhat of a shock to him. But in spite of the fact that his own inclinations lay in quite another direction, he did not hesitate to obey the Royal summons and to return to France immediately. Loyalty to Louis Seize, which throughout the whole course of his political career had always been his first consideration, and the conviction that if he avoided responsibility now he might afterwards incur blame for disasters which he foresaw were inevitable, were the principal motives in this decision.

Madame Necker, who dreaded on his account a return to further difficulties, humiliations, and possible dangers, was at first extremely unwilling that her husband should consent to re-enter the Ministry; but afterwards, when she saw that he was determined to do so, she no longer attempted

to dissuade him, and without the least hesitation prepared to accompany him back to Versailles. Accordingly, with Madame de Staël and their son-in-law, they now quitted Basle, and started to wend their way across the eastern provinces of France.

Welcomed everywhere with extraordinary enthusiasm, their journey thither resolved itself into one long triumphal progress. But in almost every district through which they passed they were immensely "struck by the change that had been wrought in public opinion in the course of only a few days, and by the extremely rapid growth of popular excitement." Necker particularly noticed that whenever, in his replies to the compliments and addresses of mayors and townspeople, he recommended "peace, union, and love of the King, he seemed often to be speaking to his admirers in a strange language."

On nearing Nogent he was informed that the Baron de Besenval,[1] who had commanded part of the troops of the Maréchal de Broglie during the disturbances in Paris on the 13th of July, had been arrested and imprisoned by the municipality of Villenaux while on his way into exile. Convinced of the injustice of such a proceeding, Necker immediately wrote a letter to the authorities of that town, asking them "to respect the King's warrant of exile," and to allow M. de Besenval to

[1] Pierre Victor, Baron de Besenval, was a Swiss general at that time in the service of France; b. 1722, d. 1791.

proceed on his way. They refused to do so, however, without an order from the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, and he was reluctantly obliged to continue his journey without having attained his object. Nevertheless he was determined to secure the Baron's release as soon as he reached his destination.

Arriving at Versailles on the 28th of July, the travellers found the Court in a state of considerable uneasiness caused by the events of the past fortnight, and the Assembly, encouraged by former successes, disposed to seize all executive powers in the near future.

The day after his return to the Contrôle-Général, where he and his family took up their residence once more, Necker went to express his thanks to the deputies of the National Assembly for the confidence they had reposed in his ability by recommending the King to recall him. The reception he was accorded at the Hôtel des États could only have been eclipsed by the ovation—one might almost say the triumph—that awaited him in Paris on the following day. This last was an event he ever afterwards looked back upon as the greatest of his life.

Accompanied by the Comte de Saint Priest,[1] he

[1] François Emmanuel Guignard, Comte de Saint Priest ; b. 1735. Formerly Ambassador to Portugal, Turkey, and also for a short time to Holland, he was admitted to the Council as Minister of State without portfolio in 1788. As one of Necker's strongest supporters, he had been dismissed at the same time as that Minister. Re-

made his public entry into the city on the morning of July the 30th. Behind the coach in which he drove were two others, the first containing the Comte de Clermont Tonnerre,[1] and the second Madame Necker and his daughter. On the outskirts of Paris the cortége was met by a troop of cavalry, which was afterwards reinforced by a squadron of dragoons and by detachments from the "Guet à Cheval," the "Cavalerie Bourgeoise," and other mounted regiments. Many of the latter had attached bunches of flowers or sprigs of bay to the barrels of their muskets, imparting thereby a festive character to the occasion, which was further enhanced by military music and by the standards—that of the Bastille being prominent among them—belonging to the regiments or districts represented in the procession.

The route chosen was by way of the Rue Saint Honoré, the Rue du Roule, the Quai de la Ferraille, and the Quai Pelletier. At the windows of every house, and in the streets themselves, an immense concourse of people had assembled to acclaim the hero of the day.

As he drove slowly by, attended by his military escort, Necker was greeted with a tremendous

called to office after the fall of the Bastille, he was nominated Secretary of State in the King's household and subsequently Minister of the Interior. He died in 1821.

[1] Stanislas, Comte de Clermont Tonnerre; b. 1747, d. 1792. A representative member of the Nobility at the States General, he became president of the minority at the time when his colleagues decided to join the deputies of the Tiers.

storm of cheering, which, being taken up from mouth to mouth, continued almost without cessation until the end of the journey. Again and again, in an ecstasy of enthusiasm, men and women kept shouting: "Vive M. Necker! Vive le grand Ministre! Que Dieu le préserve!" and from all sides praises and benedictions, such as few Ministers of France had ever received from a Parisian crowd before, were lavished in one continuous outburst of applause upon the man who many considered the saviour of their country.

Necker looked pale and seemed deeply moved, but his evident emotion in nowise prevented him from acknowledging the salutations of the crowd with dignity and self-assurance. His wife, who naturally understood his nobility of character better than any one, saving perhaps his daughter, and who for years had desired nothing so much than that others should appreciate it also, was immensely gratified by the tributes of popular esteem he now received. Of these she also had her share, since her self-sacrificing efforts on behalf of the poor of Paris were acknowledged that day in a measure that was far in excess of anything she had ever either expected or desired.

The procession arrived at the Hôtel de Ville towards one o'clock. There, on alighting, Necker was met at the foot of the grand staircase by the "Gentlemen of the Comité Permanent," who, with Bailly, the Mayor of Paris, and the Marquis

de La Fayette, were waiting to conduct him to the Hall of the representatives of the Commune.

Here, when all had assembled, Bailly delivered a preliminary address of welcome, and to this Necker replied in a speech of some length, in which he appealed to the "mercy and forbearance" of the Commune to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities [1] as had taken place during the past few days, stating that by these principles and by them alone would his own actions ever be guided.[2] Later, carried away by the depth of his feelings, he begged for an amnesty in favour of Royalists, and particularly for the release of Besenval, against whom the hatred of the people was at that time especially directed.

So eloquently did he plead the cause of the latter that before he left the room "an order to set the Baron at liberty was signed by the members of the Commune, two of whom set off with it at once to Villenaux."

Necker now made his way to the Hall of the Electors, whither his wife and daughter and M. de La Fayette had already preceded him, and where, in addition to the Electors themselves, had gathered several members of the National Assembly and a few foreigners of distinction. At the moment he mounted the President's Tribune amid the acclamations of all present,

[1] The murders of Foulon and of his son-in-law Berthier de Sauvigny.
[2] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

Moreau de Saint Méry[1] stepped forward and presented him with a tricolour badge, saying: "These, Monsieur, are colours you will surely value, for they are those of liberty." Necker, with a few appropriate words of acknowledgment, immediately took the cockade and pinned it in his hat.[2]

After this little incident, which was witnessed with great satisfaction by the spectators, he received two other complimentary addresses, the first from the President of the Assembly, and the second from Saint Méry, who did not forget to pay "a graceful tribute to the virtues" of his wife. When these formalities were concluded, Necker delivered once more the same speech as he had previously made to the representatives of the Commune. By this the Electors were even more affected than their colleagues, and before he had concluded many of those present were moved to tears by the eloquence of his words, and from all parts of the room were heard shouts of "Pardon!" "Grâce!" "Amnistie!"

Meanwhile, in the Place de Grêve outside, a huge throng of people had collected and impatiently demanded to see him. The uproar they made at length became so great, that Necker was perforce obliged to go into an adjoining room and show himself at one of the windows. No sooner

[1] Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint Méry, President of the Electors of Paris; b. 1750, d. 1819.

[2] Grimm and Diderot, 'Correspondance Littéraire.'

had he done so than the square beneath re-echoed with shouts of "Vive M. Necker!" accompanied by tumultuous clapping, which continued uninterruptedly for several minutes.[1]

On one side of Necker stood his wife, and on the other Madame de Staël. Both ladies were soon completely overcome by the transports of enthusiasm to which they now listened, while Necker himself "gave open expression to his feelings by repeatedly raising his hands to heaven, placing them on his heart, and then spreading them out towards the crowd beneath," intending by these gestures to testify to the depth of his gratitude for the popular demonstrations of goodwill.

While he was thus engaged in receiving the plaudits of the crowd, his speech to the Electors and the Members of the Commune was already bearing fruit. M. de Clermont Tonnerre had hastily drawn up an Act of Amnesty, which was first signed by all the Electors present, and then afterwards distributed in the streets of the city. When, a few minutes later, Necker returned and was informed of what had taken place in his absence, he could scarcely find words to express his unbounded gratification that this Act, which he regarded as the fulfilment of his hopes for the restoration of law and order and as an earnest of peace and happiness to come, had thus been so readily accorded at his own suggestion.

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

It was, therefore, with justifiable pride at what he had achieved that a little later he prepared to leave the Hôtel de Ville and return to Versailles. As he quitted the building flowers were strewn in his path by the people, who still seemed unable to give adequate expression to the warmth of their admiration for him.

In leaving Paris the procession followed the same order as upon its arrival, being accompanied by detachments of cavalry as before. At the Barrière de la Conférence a halt of a few minutes was made so that Necker might thank the "Garde Bourgeoise" for its services, and that he might decline the escort to Versailles with which the men of that troop seemed anxious to furnish him.

On reaching the Palace he hastened at once to acquaint the King and Queen with the terms of the Act that had been signed by the Electors of Paris.

When he learned that Necker had obtained from the latter an amnesty in favour of Royalists, Louis Seize was led to hope that his Minister might still possess the power not only to stem the tide of revolution but even, by inspiring the people with a spirit of moderation and restraint, to restore peace and tranquillity throughout the country. He was soon to find, however, that the Director-General's influence was by no means either so great or enduring as he had supposed. The ease with which he had obtained the Act of Amnesty had

unfortunately deceived Necker into the belief that it was possible "to govern by words alone," and that his presence at the head of affairs was in itself sufficient to maintain an even balance between all parties.

He did not realise that the events which had taken place in Paris since his departure on the 11th of July had given risen to exorbitant expectations in the popular mind which it was of paramount importance to keep under strong control. For during the past three weeks a desire to put an end to "the monstrous injustices of the 'ancien régime'" had been gaining ground among the lower orders with extraordinary rapidity.

It has sometimes been asserted that Necker's wisest course at this time would have been to have formed a party from among the most influential members of the National Assembly, and, in concert with them, to have followed some strong though moderate policy which might possibly have gained the approval of a majority of the deputies. Since this course would inevitably have entailed co-operation with Mirabeau, a man who he had never either trusted or esteemed and whose brilliant gifts he had therefore never recognised, Necker preferred to maintain an independent attitude, trusting solely to his popularity with the nation to quell the rising storm.

His illusions were soon dispelled, however, when he became aware of the bitter contentions to which

his Act of Amnesty had given rise. Instead of bringing about the favourable results he had anticipated, that measure had not only increased popular animosity towards the Royalists, but had aroused intense irritation among the deputies, who rightly considered that if introduced at all it should have emanated in the first instance either from the King or themselves.

Although the Marquis de Lally Tollendal,[1] as one of Necker's partisans, did his utmost to defend the Act in the Assembly and was even warmly applauded for the able manner in which he did so, Clermont Tonnerre, who had actually worded it, had the greatest difficulty to obtain a hearing, and was powerless to prevent its rejection.

It was also seen that his efforts to obtain the release of Besenval had been far from judicious, since they had placed a weapon in the hands of his enemies which they were not slow to use against him. Rumours were soon circulated to the effect "that he had defended the Baron to please the Queen; that the Polignacs would now soon make their reappearance at the Court, and that conspirators would return and revenge themselves." Soon afterwards, through the influence of Mirabeau, the order for Besenval's release was cancelled and a

[1] Trophime Gérard, Marquis de Lally Tollendal; b. 1751, d. 1830. Nominated a deputy of the Nobility of Paris to the States General, he had joined the Tiers with the minority of his order on the 25th of the preceding June.

messenger was despatched to Villenaux to secure his further detention.

By these ill-timed proceedings, prompted though they were "by the best of motives," Necker lost in less than a week much of the regard of both King and people and a great deal of the respect which had hitherto been felt for his discretion and judgment.

Scarcely had the Act of Amnesty been disposed of when at a night sitting of the Assembly on the 4th of August the entire feudal system of France was practically put an end to. Necker took but little part in the proceedings except to oppose as far as lay in his power the frenzied haste with which numberless important measures were voted or passed without being either carefully considered or properly discussed. He chiefly concerned himself with an attempt to save church property from what he considered unjust and reckless spoliation, and his endeavours in that direction speak well for his religious impartiality towards a section of the community to which he had never been under the smallest obligation.

On the 6th of August he was nominated "Premier Ministre des Finances," an appointment that virtually placed him at the head of the Cabinet, but which appears to have given him no greater authority with the other Ministers than it did with the Assembly.

The following day, by the King's command, he made an official report to the deputies upon the "deplorable condition" of the finances of the Realm, recommending that they should immediately give their consent to a loan of thirty million francs, a sum of money that he considered "indispensable to meet the urgent expenses of the next two months."

In connection with this loan Necker had prepared an elaborate scheme for raising funds, which, if it had been put into operation, might possibly have tided over existing embarrassment. As it was, however, the deputies decided to conduct the affair entirely without his co-operation, and thus the contracts he had made fell through.

The confusion arising from the failure of these negotiations naturally aggravated the difficulties of his task, and, through no fault of his own, once more impaired the public confidence in his ability.

Nevertheless, soon afterwards he proposed another loan of eighty millions, and to this the deputies, who had seen with apprehension the disastrous results of their previous policy, gave their immediate sanction.

Throughout the remaining weeks of August and the greater part of September the business of the Assembly was mainly confined to such constitutional questions as the indivisibility of the legislative body and the King's veto or "right to refuse a law."

Mainly through the influence of Necker, who desired to prevent any further encroachments upon the prerogatives of the Crown, the "Véto suspensif" was passed into law on the 11th of September, although, as was afterwards seen, the powers it gave the Sovereign were so limited as to be almost non-existent.

Towards the end of the month it became evident that the loans which had been raised at the Finance Minister's instigation were entirely insufficient for the enormous liabilities incurred by the State. In his report to the Assembly on the 24th, Necker, having explained the actual condition of affairs at the Treasury, recommended, as the only effectual means of coping with the situation, that all Frenchmen should be asked to contribute to the Exchequer a quarter of their income.

This proposal was received with amazement by the deputies, who, being still unconvinced of the extreme necessity of such a drastic expedient, at first indignantly rejected it. But after Necker had left the Hôtel des États, Mirabeau, to the surprise of all who knew of the antipathy that existed between him and the "Premier Ministre des Finances," supported the project in an extremely brilliant speech. He reminded his hearers that a man of Necker's vast experience would never have recommended a measure of such magnitude as this without having previously weighed its merits, and he warned the Assembly that unless it consented to

take that Minister's advice, irreparable disaster in the shape of national bankruptcy would immediately ensue. Yet with all his powers of eloquent persuasion, Mirabeau was obliged to speak a second time in still stronger terms before he finally succeeded in convincing his hearers of the necessity of imposing this new burden upon the nation.

Necker, however, was far from satisfied with this result. He was disappointed that the Assembly had not immediately "embraced his ideas with enthusiasm" — an attitude which he felt would have done much to ensure their success — and he was extremely mortified that it was only thanks to the intervention of Mirabeau that they had ever been adopted at all. He was convinced, moreover, that the magnanimity displayed by the latter was simply part of a deep-laid scheme "to compass his ruin." This suspicion was probably groundless, as there appears to be good reason to believe that Mirabeau had supported the project chiefly because at that time he aspired to the Presidency of the Assembly, and was anxious, in order not to increase the difficulties of that office, to see the finances properly adjusted before his election. For this cause, and also because he was really convinced of its merits, he had given his support to Necker's project without allowing himself to be influenced by any feelings of animosity towards its author.

Meanwhile the fateful month of October, which was to see the removal of the Court, the seat of

Government, and consequently of the Neckers, from Versailles to Paris, was fast approaching.

On the evening of the first day of that month a grand banquet was given to the regiment of Flanders [1] by the "Gardes du Corps," in the theatre of the palace, and was made the occasion of a political demonstration that did much to precipitate the events of the next few days.

The "repas des Gardes," as it has now become historically known, was witnessed by the King and Queen and the members of their suites from the boxes of the theatre, of which the floor was occupied by "Grenadiers de Flandre, Grenadiers des Suisses, and Chasseurs des trois Évêchés," all of whom formed part of the garrison of Versailles." [2] Upon the stage itself, at tables set horseshoe fashion, sat two hundred and ten officers, belonging chiefly to the Bodyguard or the regiment of Flanders, with here and there others from the "local national militia." The former, in token of their attachment to the Royal Family, wore white cockades, while the latter exhibited the tricolor, the national emblem. As the evening wore on it was observed by the spectators that the "white cockades of the Guards were transferred to their guests," and that this example was soon followed by the Court ladies, who, hastily fashioning badges from the white ribbons of their dresses, threw them down to the

[1] The regiment of Flanders had arrived at Versailles as an extra bodyguard for the palace on the 23rd of September.

[2] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.

men below.[1] Later, before the end of the evening's festivities, the King and Queen descended to the stage, where their presence evoked the warmest expressions of loyal devotion from the soldiers, and even from the officers of the regiment of Flanders, whose sympathies had hitherto been wholly national.

The banquet itself, but particularly the insult that had been offered to the tricolor by those who had exchanged it for the white cockade, made the worst possible impression upon the public mind. This incident, in addition to the bread famine that was daily becoming more acute in Paris, and the toleration which the National Assembly had shown towards crimes and excesses committed in all parts of the country, were the principal incentives towards the outbreak of popular violence which followed in the course of the next few days.

The events of that first week of October 1789 have been so often chronicled elsewhere that we should not venture to dwell on them again in these pages were not the Neckers then in residence at Versailles, and therefore witnesses of some of the incidents that took place there.

The Contrôle-Général now formed, as we have stated, part of the buildings of the Palace itself, being situated at no great distance from the King's apartments, with which it was connected by a long gallery. M. and Madame Necker had spent the morning of the 5th engaged in their usual occupa-

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

tions, the Finance Minister with the affairs of the Treasury and his wife with her correspondence or other literary pursuits, which still remained the chief interests of her life. With them was Madame de Staël, who had lived almost entirely with her parents since their return to Versailles at the end of July.

Towards midday vague reports began to circulate in the Palace to the effect that a mob, composed partly of women from the "Halles" and partly of a rabble from the Paris streets, had started to march to Versailles with intent to compel the Sovereign to come to the capital.

As soon as this rumour, which quickly became a certainty, found its way to the Contrôle-Général, Necker at once proceeded to the Royal apartments, where he anxiously awaited the return of the King, who all that morning had been shooting in the woods of Meudon. His wife and daughter, on realising the gravity of the situation, soon followed his example, and hastened to the State antechamber, where, in company with the ladies of the Court, they spent the rest of the day watching with great uneasiness the course of events, being "ready to follow M. Necker on the instant" if occasion demanded.[1] In the meantime two messengers had hastily been despatched, one to inform the King of the approach of the mob and to beg him to return at once to the palace, and the other on a like

[1] Maria Norris, 'The Life and Times of Madame de Staël.'

mission to the Queen, who had been spending that morning in the seclusion of the "Petit Trianon."

Marie Antoinette re-entered the Palace somewhat in advance of her husband, who did not return until later in the afternoon. Rain had then begun to descend in torrents, and the mob, which had now arrived before the main gateway of the great courtyard, was standing densely packed, facing the troops, which were drawn up in serried ranks before the gilded railings.

When at last the King appeared he at once betook himself to the Council Chamber, accompanied by the Queen and his Ministers, and there throughout the rest of that afternoon and evening endless discussions took place.

At one time, in the course of those long and weary hours of deliberation, Louis Seize received a deputation of women from the Halles who came to implore him to provide bread for the starving populace. On receiving his assurances that immediate steps should be taken to relieve this distress they retired satisfied, and rejoined the waiting crowd outside. Afterwards Mounier,[1] armed with certain decrees[2] requiring the Royal signature, came to the Palace and was received by the King, who demurred for hours before giving his

[1] Jean Joseph Mounier, b. 1758, d. 1806. Deputy of Dauphiné to the States General and President of the Assembly since 20th September.

[2] The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Extinction of Feudal Dues.

assent to measures of which he had never for an instant approved.

From time to time projects of secret flight were brought forward, but always, after brief consideration, abandoned. When proofs were no longer required to show that the lives of himself and his family were actually in danger, the King appeared not altogether unwilling to leave the country, but Necker, on being asked for his opinion, declared that he thought it was now too late to depart, and stated with good reason that "an unsuccessful attempt to get away would be manifestly hurtful to the Royal Cause."

So much delay was occasioned by his Majesty's inability to make up his mind with regard to this and other matters that night had already fallen before any definite course had been decided upon, and at that hour the last chance of removing the Royal Family to a place of safety was gone for ever.

It was not until ten o'clock in the evening that at last, with great reluctance, Louis Seize consented to sign the decrees which Mounier had brought him from the Assembly. As soon as this was done the members of the Council retired, and Necker, having rejoined his wife and daughter in the Antechamber, returned with them to the Contrôle-Général. With the subsequent incidents of that night our readers are already familiar. Not long after midnight part of the mob succeeded in reaching the gardens of the

Palace through a door in the court of the Opera House.[1] This door was guarded by a single sentinel from the militia who, by chance or design, had allowed it to remain open, thereby affording an easy means of access to the southern wing, in which the apartments of the Queen were situated.[2]

Those few men who entered first were soon joined on the terrace by numbers of others, with whom they forced an entrance into the lower galleries of the Palace and thence, by the great marble staircase, to the first-floor rooms above. Here a hurried search for the Queen's bedchamber at once began, but since not one of the rabble knew where this was situated, a few moments elapsed before it was discovered. During that short interval of time, however, Marie Antoinette, warned by the sentry at her door, was able to make her escape through a secret passage to the King's apartments, which she reached but an instant before the mob poured headlong into her room across the bodies of her murdered guards. Meanwhile the alarm had already been given to the troops outside, and M. de La Fayette had begun to form up his men. As soon as he had led them into the Palace the work of evicting pillagers and assassins was speedily accomplished, and before seven o'clock order was again restored. A short while afterwards, in obedience to the insistent demands of the foiled and angry mob, now gathered

[1] H. Belloc, 'Marie Antoinette.' [2] Ibid.

beneath their very windows, the King and Queen went on to the balcony overlooking the Marble Court and showed themselves to the people.

Of what had taken place during the preceding night the Neckers probably knew but little until after all was over. In the early hours of the morning Madame Necker had heard shots, but these had not unduly alarmed her, because she was unable to discover to what circumstances they were due. Later in the day, accompanied by Madame de Staël, she made her way to the Royal Apartments, where her husband, as head of the Council, was obliged to remain in constant attendance on the King, prepared to obey a summons from his Majesty if his services should be required.

Again, as on the afternoon and evening of the previous day, the two ladies passed many hours of that last morning at Versailles in the State Antechamber, where most of the remaining members of the Court had assembled and were now waiting, in the utmost suspense, to hear what the King intended to do. In one of the *petits appartements* near by, the Sovereigns were anxiously discussing their future movements, particularly with respect to the desire of their subjects that they should go to Paris.

Once, as she passed through the room on her way to join the King, Marie Antoinette saw and recognised Madame Necker, and with a gracious

smile of recognition paused for a moment to speak to her.[1]

As the hours wore on and mid-day approached it was known at last without a doubt that the King had decided to quit Versailles and go to Paris. It was not, however, until half-past one that the Royal coach at length drove up to the main entrance of the Palace and that he and the Queen prepared to take their departure. Half an hour later, with the rest of the Royal Family, they began their weary drive of nearly seven hours to Paris, escorted by a tumultuous crowd of desperate men and women.

The Neckers and Madame de Staël then returned to the Contrôle-Général, whence, after a brief interval of repose, they departed later in the afternoon. Following a different route to that taken by the King and Queen, they reached the city after darkness had fallen, and when the popular excitement attendant on the arrival of the Royal Family had in a measure subsided.

[1] In her 'Life and Times of Madame de Staël,' Maria Norris states that the Queen, as if foreseeing the course events would take, said to Madame Necker on that occasion : "They will force us to go to Paris, the King and myself, and will carry on their pikes the heads of our murdered guards."

CHAPTER XVI.

In the last two chapters we have endeavoured to describe the different political events connected with Necker's second and third Administrations, and in doing so have somewhat neglected the affairs of his wife. It must be remembered, however, that for the past five years at least Madame Necker had been leading a life of almost complete retirement, due, as we have already explained, partly to her declining health, partly to the loss of most of her former friends, and partly to her growing disinclination for social intercourse throughout this period of unrest and insecurity.

On her return to Paris, in October 1789, there were scarcely more than five of the original members of her literary salon with whom she still remained in touch.

Marmontel, Morellet, Saint Lambert, and Suard were almost the sole surviving representatives of her former society of men of letters, and of these only the two former were then actually residing in Paris.[1]

[1] Grimm and the Abbé Raynal also survived, but the former was then residing in England, while the latter was still in exile at Marseilles.

Saint Lambert, constant in his devotion to Madame d'Houdetôt, was still living near her at Eaubonne, while Suard and his wife had retired, since the outbreak of the Revolution, to Vaugirard, where they remained until forced to quit France a few years later.

Apart from these old friends Madame Necker's visitors mostly belonged to her daughter's circle of acquaintances. Prominent among them were Comte Matthieu de Montmorency, who had been a companion of La Fayette in the American War of Independence, and had brought back to his native land advanced opinions on liberty and reform ;[1] the Maréchal de Beauvau[2] and the Duc d'Ayen,[3] two members of the *haute noblesse* who had occasionally attended her Fridays in former days ; and the Princess de Poix, at this time an especially intimate friend of Madame de Staël.

Besides the visits she received from these, Madame Necker also saw many of the principal adherents of the constitutional party, such as the Marquis de Lally Tollendal and the Comtes de Saint Priest, de Montmorin, and de Clermont Tonnerre. But as her interests, excepting where her husband's career was concerned, had never been centred in politics, she had but little in common with any of these gentle-

[1] Matthieu Jean Félicité de Montmorency Laval, Vicomte and afterwards Duc ; b. 1766, d. 1826.

[2] Charles Juste, Maréchal de Beauvau ; b. 1729, d. 1793.

[3] Jean Paul François, Duc de Noailles, Duc d'Ayen since 1766 ; b. 1739, d. 1824.

men, and usually relied upon her husband or her daughter to entertain them whenever they came to pay their respects to her.

As for Madame de Staël, she had been taking, for some time past, a deep and ever-growing interest in the great national movement that had finally culminated in the Revolution. As an enthusiastic admirer of the English Constitution and of the principles of liberty and justice with which the government of that country had ever been associated, she had latterly been one of the most zealous supporters of the rights of the democracy in the salons in which, before the emigration, she already occupied a distinguished position. For nearly two years she had been one of a coterie of great ladies such as the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, the Comtesse de Tessé, or Madame de Castelane, who delighted to indulge in political discussions in the privacy of their boudoirs, and who managed to combine a love of intrigue with a proper fulfilment of their social duties.[1]

After her parents had taken up their residence at the Contrôle-Général at Versailles, in the summer of 1788, Madame de Staël had divided her time between them and her friends in Paris. Indefatigable in her desire to enlarge and develop her views with regard to social reforms, she had attended intimate little *réunions* or supper-parties, first at one house and then at another. By this means she

[1] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.

had not only acquired fresh ideas herself, but had done much to influence the opinions of others by airing those lofty ideals upon which her thoughts were then concentrated.

Her confidence in the favourable results of the Revolution appears to have remained unshaken by the sanguinary incidents of the autumn of 1789, and it was not until later, when she heard of far worse excesses, "that she was filled with disgust, mingled with pity, for a people . . . that had once been the victim but . . . had then become the perpetrator of inhuman crimes." Yet even at this time, when the events of October had so vividly demonstrated the ungovernable passions of the people, vague apprehensions as to the course events might take had already begun to enter her mind.

Madame de Staël had more opportunities than most women of the period of following the different phases of the political situation, for she was not only often present at the sittings of the National Assembly, but was also personally acquainted with many of the deputies. Not infrequently, when attending the former, she had to undergo the ordeal of hearing her father's proposals rejected with a want of courtesy which made such a painful impression upon her mind that she was hurriedly compelled to leave the hall overcome by feelings of the most bitter indignation.[1]

Necker's position, both now and during the

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

Photo by *Frédéric Boissonnas, Geneva.*

THE BARONESS DE STAËL-HOLSTEIN, WITH HER DAUGHTER.

By courtesy of the Proprietors of 'L'Art et les Artistes.'

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remaining months of his third and last Administration, was indeed a most unenviable one. Although still nominally head of the Cabinet, he was gradually becoming a mere cypher in the midst of unscrupulous politicians, who received whatever suggestions he chose to offer with the most supreme and mortifying indifference.

As a Cabinet Minister he was debarred[1] from personally discussing his financial schemes in the Assembly, and had to content himself with written reports which, for want of sufficient eloquence to back them, fell a prey to the incisive criticisms of Mirabeau or of his other opponents.

We can therefore partly understand the reasons which at this time induced him to carry on his official duties "enveloped in a mysterious obscurity, without giving any account of the affairs over which he presided."[2] For, as time went on, he limited his intercourse with the Assembly to the *Mémoires* he submitted at the end of each month, and these contained little more than such laconic statements as "I have so much, and I require so much."[3]

On the 19th of October, for a short while previous to its installation at "the great oval Manège" near the Tuileries, the Assembly resumed its deliberations in the residence of the Archbishop of Paris, which was situated on the Island.

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'
[2] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.
[3] Ibid.

The rest of the autumn was spent in discussing such projects as the confiscation of religious endowments and the division of the Kingdom into eighty-three departments. Both these reforms came into force shortly afterwards—the former on the 2nd of November and the latter on the 15th of the following January.

In the meantime the condition of unrest in the provinces, where wanton destruction of private property, murders, and other disorders had become incidents of almost daily occurrence, was beginning to cause grave anxiety to the Government.

After giving the matter careful consideration, Necker believed that much might be done to put a stop to such disturbances if the King would voluntarily and openly give his adherence to the Constitution which had been drawn up on the 1st of October. In order to obtain the best results from this proceeding, he advised his Majesty to pay an informal visit to the Assembly, for by so doing he was convinced that the King would not only give satisfaction to the deputies, but would favourably impress the public mind.

Louis Seize, who was disposed to follow any advice which held out hopes of restoring tranquillity, assented to this project without demur. The ceremony was therefore fixed to take place on the 4th of February, and in preparation for it Necker drew up for the King a conciliatory form of address which he trusted would meet with the approval

of all parties. On the appointed day the Sovereign, who was attended only by his First Minister of Finances and the Keeper of the Seals, was well received at the Manège, where his speech aroused the greatest enthusiasm among the deputies, who vociferously applauded him upon its conclusion. By many of them, indeed, he was hailed that day as the "Restorer of French Liberty," and after his return to the Tuileries a deputation was sent to express to him the sentiments of loyal devotion that his words had aroused in them.

But although the majority had been sincerely gratified by what the King had done, not a few were ill-pleased by the want of dignity that had marked the Royal Visit, and were by no means satisfied with the terms of an address which, beyond a number of affecting passages, setting forth the Royal Acceptance of the Constitution, "contained only the most general observations" concerning the task they had to carry out. Among these dissentients was Mirabeau, who strongly deprecated the step that Necker had taken, and did not hesitate to criticise it in a violent article in the 'Courrier de Provence.'[1]

Some authorities have asserted that Necker, before recommending Louis Seize to visit the Assembly, should first "have concerted a series of political measures with men capable of exercising influence, so that the Royal Address should have

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

begun the execution of a pre-arranged policy." Pride and conscientious scruples, however, prevented him from adopting a course which, as in the earlier days of his Ministry, would almost certainly have entailed conjunction with Mirabeau, a man whom he regarded as the chief instrument of the revolutionary party in opposition to his own. Had he attempted, however, to enter into negotiations with that deputy, it seems extremely improbable that they would ever have led to any satisfactory results. For it must be remembered that while Mirabeau had some respect for Necker's experience as a financier he had none whatever for his ability as a statesman, and in addition had always entertained a great personal dislike for him. As an instance of their strained relations at this period the following anecdote has often been related. Desiring to bring about a better understanding between these two men, who were each in a different way devoted to the interests of France, a deputy named Malouet[1] induced them with some difficulty to meet at his house. Unfortunately, no sooner did Necker set eyes on the Tribune than he asked him, with ill-concealed disdain, what his proposals were. Mirabeau, greatly offended by the Finance Minister's contemptuous manner, retorted: "My proposal, monsieur, is to wish you a very good day."[2] And with that the

[1] Pierre Victor Malouet, statesman and littérateur, and afterwards deputy for Reoni; b. 1740, d. 1814.

[2] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

interview abruptly ended. Henceforward their mutual antipathy became greater than ever, and Mirabeau lost no opportunity of humiliating Necker by opposing whatever measures he attempted to introduce.

It has already been stated that Necker had gradually become accustomed to confine his intercourse with the Assembly to monthly reports, containing only the briefest possible financial statements. These appear to have passed unnoticed by the deputies, until one day Mirabeau sarcastically referred to them as an instance of the dictatorial and perfunctory manner in which the First Minister of Finances fulfilled his administrative duties.

In order to reply to this criticism of his conduct in person, Necker visited the Manège on the 6th of March, and once more fully explained the existing condition of affairs at the Treasury. After referring to the depletion of the Exchequer and to the deficit, which he now assessed at about three hundred million livres, he warned his hearers of the grave risks that would inevitably attend the issue of a large number of Assignats,[1] and blamed them for many conspicuous blunders which, if his advice had been followed, need never have been committed. Continuing, he laid stress upon the gigantic difficulties of his office—difficulties that had lately been rendered infinitely greater by the

[1] A project which was at that time being discussed in the Assembly.

obstacles that had continually been placed in his path,—and stated in conclusion that as "he felt his strength would be unequal to cope much longer with anxieties and responsibilities that had caused him so much uneasiness," he would probably soon be obliged to retire from political life. This last announcement was received in a "frigid silence," which showed but too plainly that outside his dwindling group of partisans few of those present would regret the resignation of a Minister who, by the younger generation of politicians, was considered "importunate," incompetent, and out of date, and by the revolutionaries as an opponent whose influence, though waning, still prevented the speedy accomplishment of their aims. The sentiments entertained for him by the Assembly were now becoming those of almost the whole nation. His unswerving loyalty to the Throne, his readiness to assist the aristocrats by every means in his power, and the stubborn resistance he had so often opposed "to the mania for disorganisation" by which the revolutionary party was at this time obsessed, had alike contributed to render him hateful in the eyes of the lower classes.

Of his loyalty to the Royal Family he had given a striking proof shortly before the publication of the famous 'Livre Rouge' on the 1st of April. The facts connected with this incident are already so well known that they need not be more than briefly mentioned here.

As a register of the principal expenses of the Royal Household the 'Livre Rouge' contained an immense number of financial details, many of which were of an extremely compromising nature. This great record of accounts was kept at the Treasury, and was therefore under the control of Necker, who was well aware that if once its contents were made public they would do an infinite amount of harm to the Royal Cause, besides adding immeasurably to the unpopularity of the Queen. When, therefore, Camus,[1] Keeper of the Archives, came to request him, on behalf of the Financial Committee, to hand it over for inspection, he only consented to do so after that deputy had promised him that none of the statements it contained should be published, and that as soon as it had been examined it should be deposited at the "Comité des Pensions."

To his intense indignation, however, instead of fulfilling this agreement, Camus began at once to urge the members of the Committee to give orders for its publication, and this was the course they eventually decided to take.[2]

The facts which were thus disclosed to the world

[1] Armand Gaston Camus, deputy to the States General and the National Convention; member of the Council of the Five Hundred and of the Institute; b. 1740, d. 1804.

[2] There was another record, somewhat similar to the 'Livre Rouge,' which was also kept at the Treasury. It was called the 'Régistre des Décisions.' When Camus attempted to get possession of it, once more with a view to publication, Necker firmly declined to relinquish it.—Mémoires de Ferrières.

not only proved beyond all doubt that boundless extravagance had become almost a tradition at the Court of Versailles, but that it was in order to defray the expenses of that costly institution that the populace had so long been oppressed by a burden of crushing taxation. They tended, as Necker had foreseen, to impair still further the prestige of the Crown, and to increase a hundredfold the people's animosity towards the Queen, who, it was now discovered, had distributed her favours, in the shape of "doles" and pensions, with reckless prodigality.

Meanwhile, unknown to Necker and the other Ministers, Marie Antoinette had already begun to take measures to prevent the repetition of such attacks as these. Realising the enormous influence possessed by Mirabeau, and desiring for this reason to obtain his support for the Royal Family, she had been conducting secret negotiations for an interview with him since the middle of March.[1] At the beginning of June she quitted the Tuileries in order to spend the summer months in retirement at Saint Cloud, and it was there that this now historic meeting took place on the 4th of July. It resulted, as will be remembered, in Mirabeau, whom of all men she had hitherto most feared and detested, being intrusted by Marie Antoinette with the defence of the Crown that he alone had power to save.

[1] These negotiations were conducted by the Comte de Montmorin and the Comte de la Marck.

A few days before the Court left Paris the Assembly began to discuss the question of the "Civil Constitution of the Clergy." This was one of the few important issues of that summer in which Necker took any prominent part. Once more, in defence of ecclesiastical rights, he attempted to obtain for the Church a decision more favourable to her interests than the Assembly seemed disposed to grant. But at a meeting of the Council, at which this and other legislative affairs were discussed, his recommendations were completely disregarded, and he was therefore compelled to abandon his praiseworthy efforts. Later his proposals were again to meet with the same indifference when he attempted to prevent the abolition of titles of nobility; for the objections he raised to this measure were immediately set aside by his colleagues, who hoped, by not opposing it, to compromise the position of the revolutionaries, who had already made for themselves a host of enemies by reintroducing it.[1] But in addition to the humiliating opposition with which he was thus meeting both in the Assembly and the Council, he was now encountering a far more subtle and provoking form of enmity.

Libels and accusations of every sort were once more being freely circulated against him in the city, and aspersions of the most odious nature

[1] Titles of nobility had already been virtually abolished at a night sitting of the Assembly on the 4th of August 1789.

were being cast both upon his patriotism and his honour.[1]

Desiring publicly to refute these imputations, Necker made a declaration to the Assembly on the 1st of August, in which he protested that as the oldest and most loyal friend of the people, he had never for an instant permitted the burden of care and anxiety to distract him from a rigid observance of his responsibilities.[2] He achieved, however, but little from this attempted vindication of his conduct, for after a brief interval calumnies of a yet more abominable character began to be spread about as freely as before.

During the month of August, with taxes unpaid and credit unobtainable, another financial crisis seemed imminent. The Committee, which now controlled affairs relating to taxation and the National Debt, had under consideration a scheme for replenishing the Exchequer by a further issue of Assignats.[3] So small, however, was the value now placed upon his services, that no attempt was made to communicate this scheme to Necker.

[1] By these it appeared that his well-known desire to assist the Royalists, though prompted solely by feelings of humanity, was construed into an act of treachery towards the nation, and that it had contributed, even more than his opposition to revolutionary projects, to render him extremely unpopular among the lower classes. It was also asserted that he was at this time remitting large sums of money to the Comte d'Artois, and this rumour, though entirely devoid of truth, also received general credence.

[2] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.

[3] A first instalment of 400,000,000 Assignats had been issued on the 17th of the preceding April.

When at length he indirectly heard of it he immediately presented a report to the Assembly, severely criticising so drastic a measure, and declaring that there was no foundation for the statements made by the Financial Committee with regard to the deficit, which had been estimated at far too high a figure.[1] He went on to emphasise "the dangers not only to the Government but to private persons that would eventually spring from a large production of paper money," and added "that a scheme for overcoming at one stroke difficulties resulting from a series of extraordinary events that had covered a period of several years, should be considered with the utmost caution." This warning was listened to with "marked impatience" by the deputies, who made it evident by their attitude that they did not consider it worth a moment's serious consideration.

Convinced at last of his own impotence, Necker now felt that no other course was left open to him but to retire, and this he soon afterwards decided to do. Before he had actually handed in his resignation, however, a situation arose which compelled him suddenly to quit Paris and seek safety for some hours at Saint Ouen. The circumstances which led him to do so were as much the result of his efforts to secure from the Assembly a rejection of another issue of assignats as of fresh libels asserting that he had been responsible for the execution

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

of seditious troops at Nancy after the insurrection in that city a few weeks before. This last report, though mere fabrication, found ready credence among the lower orders, which became in consequence more than ever embittered against him.[1]

On the 2nd of September, in accordance with a plot that seems to have emanated from certain members of the revolutionary party, a mob from the streets, incited by a few of the Jacobins, gathered at the doors of the Manège and loudly demanded the dismissal of the Ministers.[2] With intent to enforce the popular wishes, another rabble proceeded to surround the residences of the Vicomte de Latour du Pin[3] and the Comte de Saint Priest,[4] and would doubtless have done the same to that of Necker had he not been warned to quit it.[5]

La Fayette, who had been carefully watching the movements of the populace, sent one of his aides-de-camp, at about eight o'clock in the evening, to inform Necker of the danger he was incurring by remaining longer at his house, and to recommend him to leave the city as soon as possible.[6]

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

[2] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.

[3] Jean Frédéric, Vicomte de la Tour du Pin Gouvernet; b. 1727, d. 1794. At this time Minister for War, he had previously been Military Governer of Poitou and Saintonge, and deputy of the Nobility of Saintes to the States General.

[4] The Comte de Saint Priest was now Minister of the Interior.

[5] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.

[6] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

Immediately after he received this message, Necker entered his carriage and drove out to Saint Ouen, where his sudden appearance at a late hour in the evening caused considerable excitement among the inhabitants of the village.[1] His wife, who had been spending the summer at the château, a prey to care and anxiety from which, as she afterwards asserted, she was at this time never for an instant free, was amazed by his totally unexpected arrival, but her astonishment quickly gave place to consternation when she learned the cause of his abrupt departure from Paris. There was but little time for explanation between them, however, for the agitation among the villagers soon became so great that Necker judged it prudent, both for his wife's sake as well as his own, to depart once more. He therefore left the château, made his way out into the open country, and passed the remainder of the night wandering in the neighbouring valley of Montmorency.[2]

The incidents of the past few days had already impressed him with the hopelessness of his prospects, but after once more reviewing them during the long hours of that awful night, he was convinced that it would no longer be possible for him to remain in office.

The next day, accompanied by Madame Necker, who was now in a state of extreme anxiety on his

[1] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'
[2] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.

account, he returned to Paris, and as soon as he reached his house at once began to prepare letters informing the King and the President of the Assembly of his intended retirement. With the apparent object of concealing the real motives of his decision, he stated, in each of these documents, that his desire to resign had alone been influenced by the unsatisfactory condition of his health, which had become seriously impaired by the insuperable difficulties he had encountered in the past two years. As an answer to the libels by which he had so long been harassed, and as a further proof of his disinterested intentions, he informed the Assembly that he had decided to leave in the Treasury the two million livres he had formerly deposited there, and that he desired to place his town house at the disposal of the State.

So entirely had he ceased to occupy any predominant place in administrative affairs, that except among those deputies who had schemed to bring it about, his resignation was regarded with absolute unconcern. The contempt and indifference that had latterly been felt for him by revolutionaries on the one side and by constitutionalists on the other had been provoked as much by his incapacity at the head of affairs as by the ineffectual means he had adopted to combat the national bankruptcy.

It now seemed evident to many that the national ruin might be ascribed in a large measure to the system of contracting loans that he had instituted

—a system which, by affording the Government, in former years, an easy means of providing for the expenses of the Court, had gradually become an inevitable part of financial administration, and had ended by enormously increasing the National Debt.

The vacillating and uncertain policy of the earlier days of his second Administration, particularly at the time of the assembling of the States General, when, to the Court party at least, he had appeared to play into the hands of the democracy, had doubtless done something to instigate anarchy and to place in the hands of revolutionaries a power that could no longer be wrested from them.

In concluding this brief account of Necker's last Ministry we cannot do better than refer our readers to the following able criticism of his qualities both as statesman and financier.

"Éminent," writes M. Joubert, "par une rare réunion de qualités morales et intellectuelles, mais dénué de la force de volonté indispensable à un homme d'État, Necker eut l'apparence d'un grand ministre lorsqu'il n'était qu'un grand et honnête financier. Plus tard il fut au dessous de sa réputation et des circonstances, et malgré son intégrité, sa bienfaisance, son amour du bien public, il perdit rapidement sa popularité ; sa chute fut prompte et irrémédiable, mais elle n'eut rien de tragique, puisqu'elle lui laissa le bonheur domestique et l'opulence. Sa gloire, soigneusement défendue par l'admiration de sa femme, de sa fille et de son

petit-fils, est venue jusqu'à nous sans trop de diminution, et ceux même qui le jugent sévèrement ne lui contestent pas d'avoir été un des hommes les meilleurs et les plus honnêtes de son temps." [1]

Since his resignation had been accepted by the King there was now nothing further to detain him or his wife in Paris, and they accordingly decided that as soon as their preparations for departure were completed they should leave France and betake themselves to Coppet.

On the 8th of September they took leave of Madame de Staël, who, having given birth to a son at the end of August, was unable to accompany them, and started on their journey, which was destined to be fraught with considerable danger. In almost every town or village through which he passed — wherever, indeed, he was recognised — Necker met with the greatest hostility from the very same country people who, a little more than a year before, had so triumphantly acclaimed his return from exile. At last, on reaching Arcis-sur-Aube, he was arrested by the Municipality of that town, and in spite of the fact that before leaving Paris he had taken the precaution to provide himself with two passports, one from the King and another from the Mayor, he was detained for some hours in custody.[2] Immediately after his arrest a messenger was despatched by the authorities of

[1] Nouvelle Biographie Universelle.
[2] Joseph Droz, 'Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.'

Arcis to inform the National Assembly "that the people, convinced of the great principle of the responsibility of Ministers, awaited the commands of that body concerning the course of action that should be adopted with regard to Necker."

When this message reached its destination several of the deputies "proposed that the Municipality of Arcis should be thanked for its vigilance," and one of them even went so far as to urge that Necker "should be forbidden to leave the Kingdom." [1]

Finally, however, more merciful counsels prevailed, and it was agreed that an order should be sent to set him at liberty, accompanied by a letter that would serve him "as a passport and ensure the safety of the rest of his journey." [2]

In the course of the debate to which this affair gave rise it is said that Camus, who had harboured a grudge against Necker ever since the time he had tried to prevent the publication of the 'Livre Rouge,' only consented with extreme reluctance to the despatch of this letter, and insisted that "care should be taken not to congratulate the late Minister upon his Administration." [3]

But even after leaving Arcis the travellers' difficulties were not yet ended, for at Vesoul their progress was again hindered by an angry mob, which but for the timely intervention of the Municipality would doubtless have wreaked its

[1] Mémoires du Marquis de Ferrières.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

vengeance upon the man who was not regarded as a Minister going into retirement but as "a traitor fleeing from justice." From Vesoul they continued their journey without further molestation, and eventually arrived at Coppet towards the end of September.

CHAPTER XVII.

The last occasion that M. and Madame Necker had visited the shores of the Lake of Geneva had been in the summer of 1784. Although no longer at that time a Minister of France, the former was still enjoying the fruits of his five years' successful Administration, during which his policy of putting an end to many long-standing abuses and of instituting necessary reforms had won him the confidence and esteem of the greater part of the French nation. On his return to Coppet in the autumn of 1790, however, his prospects were very different. For not only had his popularity in France entirely vanished, but he was generally looked upon as a man who had utterly failed in the work he had undertaken, and as one whose incapacity had greatly accelerated the ruin of his adopted country.

Deeply humiliated by the contempt with which he knew that most Frenchmen regarded him, Necker's great desire was now to justify his conduct by publishing a complete explanation of the principal acts of his Ministry, and this task he

soon afterwards took in hand. The state of utter dejection into which he had fallen was an unending cause of grief to his wife, who, until she had discovered the futility of doing so, made every effort to distract his mind from the contemplation of his own misfortunes. For this reason she eagerly welcomed the society of the few friends she still possessed in the district, for she hoped that through intercourse with them her husband might be able to find relief from the perpetual feeling of despair that seemed to haunt him. To supply him with the companionship which she thought he needed in addition to her own she was at this time greatly dependent upon Edward Gibbon, who had come back to reside permanently at Lausanne some two years before. Soon after her return there Madame Necker invited him to spend a few days at Coppet, and Gibbon, who accepted this invitation with pleasure, afterwards recorded in his journal some impressions of his visit. From the following words it will be seen that he was greatly struck by the change that had taken place in his host since he had last seen him in 1784. "I passed four days," he writes, "with Necker, and could have wished to have shown him as a warning to any aspiring youth possessed with the demon of ambition. With all the means of private happiness in his power he is the most miserable of human beings: the past, the present, and the future are equally odious to him. When I suggested some domestic amusement of

Photo by *Jullien Frères, Geneva.*

THE CHÂTEAU DE COPPET FROM THE ENTRANCE-GATES.

books, building, &c., he answered with a deep tone of despair, 'Dans l'état où je suis je ne puis sentir que le coup de vent qui m'a abattû.'"

Gibbon appears, like most other people, to have looked upon Necker as a victim to his own ambition, for he continues: "It is true that Necker wished to be carried into the closet like old Pitt, on the shoulders of the people; and that he has been ruined by the democracy which he had raised. I believe him to be an able financier, and know him to be an honest man; too honest, perhaps, for a Minister."[1] This description of Necker's state of mind appears to be by no means exaggerated, since all who came in touch with him during these first weeks after his return to his native land bear witness to the same facts. His wife, though she felt in reality as much oppressed by it as he did, succeeded for once in bearing their misfortune with much greater fortitude than her husband. Thanks to the voluminous correspondence she still kept up with a variety of different people, and to the society of one or two of the principal residents of Lausanne and Geneva, she managed to introduce sufficient distraction into her life to enable her sometimes to forget the incidents of the past two years. Upon the approach of winter she and her husband established themselves in a house they possessed in Geneva. Both in that city and at Lausanne there were

[1] Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works.

at that time a number of French emigrants, who had been attracted thither not only by the language of the country, but also by its proximity to France—a situation that was considered of great advantage in the event of a speedy termination to the Revolution. Other refugees were constantly passing through the district on their way to join the Court which the Comte d'Artois had temporarily established at Turin, but so convinced were they that Necker was chiefly to blame for the circumstances which had rendered their flight imperative, that not one of them would enter his house. Madame Necker, who was compelled, of course, to share the ostracism which was thus inflicted on her husband, naturally felt deeply wounded when she found herself ignored by people who, in the days of her prosperity, had so often accepted her hospitality. As far as her husband was concerned, however, the only effect of such treatment was to make him all the more desirous to rehabilitate himself by hastening on the publication of his 'Essai sur l'administration de M. Necker par lui-même.'[1] This work has perhaps been rightly described as "a sentimental glorification of himself," and as a "perpetual lamentation upon the ingratitude of men, and

[1] 'L'Essai sur l'administration de M. Necker par lui-même' appeared early in 1791, and was followed, a little over a year later, by his 'Étude sur le pouvoir exécutif dans les grands États,' in which he denounced, in no mean terms, the Constitution of 1791, and exposed the disastrous consequences of democratic rule.

particularly of that Assembly which owed him its existence." While possessing, like all his writings, a considerable amount of literary merit, it quite failed to convince his enemies of the excellence of his intentions, or of the lofty aims by which his administrative acts had been guided. Nevertheless, the very fact of having placed his case before the world was in itself the cause of so much satisfaction to him that from that time forward an improvement in his health and spirits became plainly noticeable.

The spring of 1791 was already well advanced before he returned with Madame Necker to Coppet, and it was there that they spent the greater part of the next six months. Except for Gibbon, the widowed Madame Moultou [1] and her daughter, and the de Severys—a family with whom she had long been intimately connected,—Madame Necker appears to have seen but few other people in the course of that time; and since she had now lost the companionship of her daughter her life had become one of greater seclusion than ever.

Before the close of the previous year Madame de Staël had spent some weeks with her parents both at Coppet and Geneva, but the atmosphere of intense melancholy pervading their house, in addition to the dulness of Genevese society, had become so irksome to her, that in spite of the danger that such a course entailed she had now

[1] Madame Necker's old friend Pasteur Moultou had died in 1788.

returned to Paris. The sight of her beloved father, broken in health and crushed by his disgrace, had been for her an infliction she had found the more unbearable since all her efforts to cheer and distract him had proved, like those of her mother, entirely fruitless. It is of some interest to remember that although she was well aware of the bitter animosity that was felt towards him in France, she still cherished the hope of eventually seeing him restored to power, and no sooner did she reach Paris than she began to exert all her influence with her political friends in order to effect that object. She was now once more residing with her husband at the Swedish Embassy in the Rue du Bac, where, until the latter half of 1792, she was able to offer a harbour of refuge to several of her friends who often owed their lives to the ingenious methods she employed to outwit their enemies.

The Neckers again took up their residence at Geneva on the approach of winter, and that season passed by for them with the same uneventfulness as in the previous year. In March the monotony of their existence was pleasantly enlivened by another visit from Gibbon, who came from Lausanne to spend the whole of that month with them. In order to make his sojourn as pleasant as possible, Madame Necker took care to invite all her most interesting acquaintances to meet him, and her efforts to entertain him

would appear, from his own account, to have been eminently successful. "I have . . . most agreeably," he mentions in a letter to Lord Sheffield, "executed my plan of spending the month of March at Geneva in the Necker house, and every circumstance that I had arranged turned out beyond my expectation: the freedom of the morning, the society of the table and drawing-room, from half an hour past two till six or seven; an evening assembly and card party, in a round of the best company, and, excepting one day in the week, a private supper of free and friendly conversation." During this visit Gibbon was able to modify his earlier opinions of Necker, in whom he now discovered qualities of which he had not previously known the existence. "I have really," he says, "a much higher idea of him than I ever had before; in our domestic intimacy he cast away his gloom and reserve; I saw a great deal of his mind, and all that I saw is fair and worthy." [1]

Curiously enough, in this, as in other letters the great historian is known to have written at that period, we find no mention, except in the very briefest terms, of the lady in whose company he then so often found himself. His silence concerning Madame Necker seems only to be explained by the fact that, although he apparently still enjoyed her society, he had long since relegated

[1] Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works.

her in his mind to the position of an old friend whose personal charms had ceased to attract him. But whatever may have been his real sentiments for her, Madame Necker's for him remained the same as they had always been since her marriage, namely, those of warm friendship and sincere regard. Throughout the years she had lived in France her interest in him had never wavered, and now towards the end of her life, when he was among the last surviving friends of her youth, he was probably dearer to her than any one else except the members of her own family. "You are to me," she tells him, in the poetic strain she so often adopted in her letters, "like a solitary tree, the shade of which still covers the desert which separates me from the first years of my life." His visit to her in the spring of 1792 had afforded her immense pleasure, as is seen by the following passage from a letter she wrote to him a few weeks after he had returned to Lausanne.[1] "We often think, Monsieur, of the delightful days we spent with you in Geneva. During that time I experienced a sensation new to me, and perhaps to many other people as well. By the rarest favour of Providence I brought together in the same place one of the pure and tender affections of my youth and that other affection which makes my destiny here on earth so truly enviable. This coincidence, coupled with the delights of inimitable

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker.

conversation, inspired me with a sort of feeling of enchantment; and the union between past and present made my days like one of those dreams which come to console mortals from the ivory door."[1]

Not long after her guest's departure Madame Necker went for a time to Rolle, her removal thither being necessitated by the state of her health, which again required constant change of air and scene. Rolle was not only suitable for this purpose, but possessed the additional advantage of being near enough to Lausanne to enable Gibbon to come and see her far more frequently than he could have done had she remained at Geneva. By June, however, she had returned with her husband to Coppet, where, towards the end of the month, tidings reached them of the sinister events which had recently taken place in France.[2] In watching the ever-changing aspect of political affairs in that country they both felt a great deal of personal anxiety, since their daughter was still living in the very centre of popular agitation. Madame de Staël was now alone in Paris, her husband having returned to Sweden earlier in the year. Ever since the summer of 1789 the Baron had been taking a more active interest in the new movement than was compatible with his position as the representative of a foreign power, and this attitude, combined with the close connection he had maintained with certain members of the Constituent

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker.

[2] The flight of Louis Seize and the members of his family to Varennes; their recapture and return as prisoners to Paris.

Assembly, had incensed Gustavus, who had ever manifested the strongest aversion to revolutionary principles and ideas. In consequence of his indiscretions, M. de Staël was dismissed from his diplomatic appointment and recalled to Stockholm. Ere he reached that city, however, Gustavus had been assassinated, and during the subsequent Regency of the Duke of Sudermania, the Baron was for a short time reinstated in his former position.

While her husband was engaged in looking after his interests, which had been jeopardised by his disgrace, Madame de Staël continued to remain at the Embassy, feeling reluctant, in spite of increasing danger, to follow the example of those who had already sought safety in flight. Since the King and Queen and their children had failed in their attempt to leave France in June she had attempted to devise a new plan of escape for them which, if it had ever been properly carried out, might possibly have proved successful.[1] She had confided her scheme to the Comte de Montmorin,[2] with directions that all the arrangements connected with it should be placed in the hands of the Comte de Narbonne, a man whose notorious weakness of

[1] Her intention was to convey the Royal Family secretly to England by way of Dieppe.

[2] Armand Marc, Comte de Montmorin ; b. 1745, d. 1792. Nominated Ambassador to Madrid soon after the accession of Louis XVI., he subsequently became a member of the Assembly of the Notables in 1787, and almost immediately afterwards Minister for Foreign Affairs in succession to the Comte de Vergennes. He afterwards co-operated with Necker in making arrangements for the assembling of the States General, and ended his political career as Minister of the Interior (1791).

character made him totally unfitted to conduct such an enterprise. But whether because the latter's incapacity foredoomed it to failure from the outset, or, as seems more probable, because it was not even communicated to the King and Queen, then overwhelmed by the events of the 10th of August, her project was never seriously undertaken.

Unsuccessful though she appears to have been in her efforts to save the unfortunate occupants of the Tuileries, Madame de Staël yet had the satisfaction of being able to effect the escape of many of her friends. Throwing herself heart and soul into this perilous venture, she would carry her devotion to the point of considering "that she had done nothing for them unless she had secured the safety of their relations as well as themselves," and heedless of the risks she incurred she would often endanger her own life by her indefatigable exertions on their behalf. Her object was generally attained by means of passports procured in the names of men and women of Swiss nationality, or sometimes, thanks to her husband's influence, in those of Swedish citizens. The latter stratagem she employed with complete success in the case of two distinguished men with whom she had long been on terms of intimacy, namely, the Vicomte de Montmorency-Laval[1] and the Marquis de Jaucourt,[2] afterwards Minister of

[1] Matthieu Jean Félicité de Montmorency-Laval, Vicomte, afterwards Duc ; b. 1766, d. 1826.

[2] Arnail François, Marquis de Jaucourt ; b. 1757, d. 1852.

Marine under Louis XVIII. Before the end of August, however, all further efforts in this direction were brought to a sudden conclusion by her own arrest. This, in her case, would almost certainly have been followed by a term of imprisonment and by eventual execution had she not, through the help of a National Guard,[1] been enabled to leave Paris before she was actually convicted. After miraculously escaping "through pikes and poignards" on the very day when the terrible September massacres began, she arrived a week later at Coppet, where her return was hailed with the utmost thankfulness by her parents. The anxiety of the Neckers concerning her safety had lately been greatly augmented by the accounts they had received of the recent deaths of several men and women formerly well known to them. Only a short time before they had heard with horror that the Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, one of Necker's chief supporters in his last Ministry, had been murdered in the streets of Paris, and this news had been followed a little later by that of the massacres of the Comte de Montmorin and the Duc de la Rochefoucauld.[2] The former had perished at

[1] Maria Norris, 'The Life and Times of Madame de Staël.' The National Guard here referred to was, of course, Tallien, the future Secretary and then President of the National Convention.

[2] Louis Alexandre, Duc de la Roche-Guyon and Duc de la Rochefoucauld-d'Enville, member of the Assembly of the Notables, 1787, and afterwards deputy from the noblesse of Paris to the States General; b. 1743, d. 1792.

the Abbaye on the second of September and the latter had been stoned to death at Gisors while on his way to Forges.

The horrible circumstances attending the death of each of these unfortunate noblemen had deeply moved Madame Necker, and in one of her letters to Gibbon she thus refers to them: "All these distinguished men were our friends or acquaintances; they all contributed to the pleasures of our lives, but now we can no longer enjoy this cherished recollection without crossing in imagination the river of blood that divides us from them."

Not long after she wrote these words Madame Necker and her family were suddenly compelled to leave their country house, for Coppet was menaced with occupation by French troops under the Marquis de Montesquiou, who had lately achieved the submission of Savoy after an almost bloodless campaign. His at present unknown intentions gave rise to a good deal of speculation and to not a little alarm among the inhabitants of Geneva, but more particularly among the French *émigrés* in residence there, and as many of these last as could do so retired to Lausanne. In the meantime, eleven thousand Bernese were mustering in the neighbourhood of Coppet and Nyon, and reinforcements of men and artillery were arriving daily.

After leaving their château the Neckers betook themselves to the house they had formerly rented at Rolle, and this afforded them a fairly safe retreat

until the crisis was over. There they were constantly visited by Gibbon, who often spent hours discussing with Necker the serious situation that had arisen. At one time, in view of possible contingencies, they considered the advisability of removing to a place of greater security—a course they would certainly have adopted if the French had decided to occupy Geneva. "For my part," wrote Gibbon, "till Geneva falls, I do not think of a retreat; but, at all events, I am provided with two strong horses and an hundred louis in gold. Zurich would be probably my winter quarters, and the society of the Neckers would make any place agreeable." [1]

Such an expedient was found to be unnecessary, however, for with the subsequent withdrawal of the Bernese forces French demands were satisfied, and by the end of October tranquillity was again restored to the neighbourhood.

Since, however, the city was now frequented by French officers and men to whom their very name was odious, the Neckers did not venture to return to Geneva as they would have wished to do, and they were still obliged to remain at Rolle, where, in the month of November, they had a curious experience which is thus described by Gibbon: "An odd incident happened in the French army—the desertion of the general. As the Neckers were sitting about eight o'clock in the evening in their drawing-

[1] Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works, vol. i.

room at Rolle, the door flew open, and they were astounded by their servant's announcing Monsieur le Général de Montesquiou.[1] On the receipt of some secret intelligence of a *décret d'accusation*, and an order to arrest him, he had only time to get on horseback, to gallop through Geneva, to take boat to Coppet, and to escape from his pursuers, who were ordered to seize him alive or dead. He left the Neckers after supper, passed through Lausanne in the night and proceeded to Berne and Basle, whence he intended to wend his way through Germany, amidst enemies of every description, to seek a refuge in England, America, or the moon."[2]

M. de Montesquiou appears to have become suspect to the revolutionary authorities in Paris owing to the constitutional opinions he was believed to hold, and which were now considered treasonable to the Republic. Thus, despite his ability as a general and his past record of military successes, an order to arrest him "alive or dead" was issued on the 9th of November. Although no charge could be made against his patriotism, a pretext for accusation was easily found in the manner in which "he had conducted negotiations with the Magistrates of Geneva with regard to the withdrawal of the Swiss troops."

[1] Anne Pierre, Marquis de Montesquiou-Fezensac; b. 1739, d. 1798. Formerly first equerry to the Comte de Provence, he had represented the Nobility of Paris at the States General, and afterwards became President of the Constituent Assembly. He took over the command of the Armée du Midi towards the end of 1791, and in that capacity achieved the conquest of Savoy in the following year.

[2] Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works.

He was supposed to have "compromised the dignity of the Republic" by "acting with too much tameness and delay," and, as Gibbon states, "was accused of making very foul and exorbitant contracts."

By the middle of December the French troops had finally quitted the country, so that the Neckers were free at last to return to their house in the city. This year they had been more particularly anxious to do so, because, by giving their daughter an opportunity to avail herself of the social amenities of Geneva, they hoped to be able to prevent her from carrying out a project she had formed of going to England to join the *émigrés*, who had gathered there in considerable numbers. In the earlier part of the autumn Madame de Staël had still continued her endeavours to assist the victims of the Revolution, but later, as the birth of her second son drew near, she had been temporarily obliged to abandon her purpose and to follow a *régime* of comparative inactivity. This, though necessary, had been far from congenial to her, and once the birth of her child had taken place she felt an irrepressible longing to re-enter the great world beyond the narrow limits of the Swiss mountains. Now, when some of the worst episodes of the Revolution were daily taking place in Paris, her thoughts remained fixed upon the terrible plight of those unfortunate men and women who were paying the penalty of death for aristocratic birth and once exalted station. Believing that she might be able to be of greater ser-

vice to them by acting in co-operation with French *émigrés* in England, she left Geneva early in January and set out for London.

Greatly disappointed that they had been unable to dissuade her from undertaking such a journey in the middle of winter, her father and mother returned to Rolle a few days after she left them. During the succeeding weeks of the new year they waited in great suspense to hear the result of the trial of Louis Seize, which was then taking place in Paris. In the previous autumn Necker had devoted much time and thought to a "Defence" he had written on behalf of that ill-fated Sovereign, and this, he had been led to hope, would exercise some influence over the King's Republican judges. To his infinite disappointment, however, he soon discovered that his authorship was alone sufficient to condemn in the eyes of Frenchmen any production of his, no matter what claims to attention it might possess. Thus, as the end of the trial approached, neither he nor Madame Necker dared to hope for a favourable issue, and when at last they learned that Louis Seize had been executed, they received the news with intense sadness, though without surprise.

In February Gibbon again came to spend a few days with them, and this, though they did not realise it then, was the last time they were ever destined to see him. Two months later he left Lausanne to rejoin his friend Lord Sheffield in England. Not long after he arrived there his

health, which had been far from satisfactory for some time past, perceptibly began to decline, and he finally died in London on the 16th of January 1794. About five weeks after he left them the Neckers returned to Coppet, and a little later were rejoined by Madame de Staël, who had quitted England in order to pursue once more her schemes of rescue in closer proximity to the French frontier. Before many months had elapsed, however, she was to devote herself to another task of even greater interest. As the time for the trial of Marie Antoinette approached she decided to make an appeal to the French nation in a little pamphlet called "Réflexions sur le procès de la reine." In this work she employed all her marvellous powers of eloquence in defence, not of a fallen Sovereign, but of a woman who, alike in prosperity and misfortune, had ever shown herself a model wife and a devoted mother. Unfortunately, public opinion, too long accustomed to regard the Queen as the principal cause of the ruin of France, had ceased to be able to recognise or admire in her character any of those higher qualities so touchingly emphasised by Madame de Staël. Her appeal fell, therefore, on deaf ears, and met, if that were possible, with an even colder reception than had been accorded to her father's "Defence of the King" in the autumn of 1792.

It was during this same summer, not many weeks before the execution of Marie Antoinette, that the Neckers learned, to their intense indignation, that

all their remaining possessions in France had been confiscated by order of the Revolutionary Government.[1] This had been done by virtue of a law that had been passed to the effect that everything still owned by *émigrés* was henceforward to be appropriated by the State. That efforts were made by her husband to reclaim his property is proved by Madame Necker's reference to the matter in a letter she wrote on the 12th of July.[2] "We are now engaged," she states, "in claiming our two millions intrusted to France for motives of the utmost delicacy for a period of fifteen years, and temporarily pledged in order to provide the country with necessary funds. Interest upon these two millions has been refused us even in assignats." But in addition to this large sum of money the Château of Saint Ouen, together with its park and gardens, had been seized, and a large placard bearing the inscription "Bien national à vendre" had been affixed to the entrance gates.[3] Such a complete confiscation of property had been an act of even greater injustice in Necker's case than in that of emigrants who were actually French by birth, since throughout the whole course of his residence in France he had never attempted to naturalise himself or his family, and had always retained the rights and privileges of a citizen of Geneva. This fact being well known to the authorities in Paris, it was evident that the seizure of his

[1] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'
[2] Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works.
[3] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

house and fortune could only be attributed to the still active antipathy of his numerous enemies. In spite of the persistent attempts he made to do so, Necker never succeeded in regaining his lost possessions, but after the Restoration the two million francs which he had deposited in the Treasury in 1778 were restored to his daughter by Louis XVIII.

The loss of Saint Ouen, which was associated with the happiest years of her married life, had been a source of untold regret to Madame Necker, who had always expressed a hope that on her death she might be buried beneath the lime-trees in the park, where she and her husband had so often sat together in former days.[1] This thought had been constantly present in her mind during the past few years, for with increasing infirmity she could not disguise from herself the probability that she had not long to live. Since her return to Switzerland in 1790 she had had two extremely severe attacks of her old disorder. The first occasion — probably as a direct result of the perils through which she had passed on the journey from Paris—had taken place on the day after her arrival, while the second, of a much more serious character, had occurred early in 1792, and for a time had occasioned her husband the gravest fears for her life. Towards the end of the summer of 1793 her condition again began to give him and her daughter serious cause for alarm. By October she had be-

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'

come so dangerously ill that Necker, desiring to secure the services of an expert physician without delay, decided to go to Lausanne, where his wife would be within easier reach of the celebrated Dr Tissot.[1] She was therefore moved in the course of November to a house situated among vineyards a little above the town, in a position commanding magnificent views of the lake and distant mountains. During the first weeks after she went there, some slight improvement appears to have taken place in her condition, for she was able to spend some time every day lying on a couch before the window of her room, from which she could look down upon a scene that must have recalled to her mind so many incidents connected with her early life. On her return to the Pays de Vaud in the autumn of her days, she had often looked back with regret to that now long distant period of her life, and to the friends that had belonged to it. The following passage from the 'Mélanges' enables us to form some idea of her attitude of mind towards this subject. "Regret for the past," she observes, "ever turns my thoughts to that Being for Whom no period of time has ever passed away; I seem to see Him surrounded by every hour of our lives, and it is beside Him that I seek for those moments and for those people who appear to have ceased to exist for us on earth: by

[1] Simon André Tissot, a specialist in fevers and diseases of the nerves who practised at Lausanne; b. 1728, d. 1797.

this means my wandering, melancholy thoughts can find a refuge, and my soul can rest in peace." But apart from the reminiscences and regrets to which her return to Lausanne must once more have given rise, there was one thought in her mind that had so often excluded every other that it had now, with the near approach of death, become almost an obsession. Ever since she had left France, but particularly in the past few months, she had been making preparations, with surprising calmness and self-possession, for the eventual disposal of her remains. Many years before, at the time she had undertaken to found a hospital for the poor of Paris, she had more than once heard of cases of premature burial—a subject upon which she had subsequently written a pamphlet,[1]—and the horror that such a fate might possibly await herself had impelled her to make the most careful provisions for her own interment. Again and again she had written down explicit directions regarding the precautions she desired her husband to take, and had insisted that her body should not be committed to the grave until a certain number of days had elapsed, and all doubt of her decease had finally been dispelled. Further, she had gone so far as to request that before her body was placed in the tomb it should be embalmed with face exposed; that access to this tomb should be gained by an iron door, the key of which was always to be kept

[1] 'Les Inhumations Précipitées.' Paris, 1790.

in M. Necker's possession; and that finally, upon the latter's death, his remains should be laid to rest beside her own.[1] This last desire, inspired as it was by the intensity of her affection for her husband, was a detail of far greater importance in her eyes than the directions she had given for her actual burial. For her great wish had always been that her union with Necker, which had never been darkened by a single cloud, should survive even the grave itself. Until a year ago she had hoped, as has been said, to be buried beneath the lime-trees in the park at Saint Ouen, but with the confiscation of the château and the surrounding demesne, this desire could no longer be fulfilled. By a will drawn up in January 1794, she therefore requested her husband to carry out at Coppet all the preparations she had previously made for her interment at Saint Ouen. It was at this time that Necker, perceiving that her days were numbered, proceeded to devote himself, with admirable self-sacrifice, to his dying wife, upon whom he is said "to have lavished cares which it is impossible by description to give an adequate idea."[2]

Throughout her last illness Madame Necker was rarely free from pain, and her sufferings, becoming especially acute at night-time, often deprived her of sleep. Worn out by hours of

[1] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'Le Salon de Madame Necker.'
[2] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'

restlessness, she used to lie, when day arrived, speechless and exhausted upon her bed, and then it was that her husband would enter her room and remain for hours beside her, supporting her head upon his arm. By this means she would sometimes be able to fall asleep, but Necker, not daring to move for fear of disturbing her, would retain his place, standing or sitting by the side of her bed, until two or three hours later she awoke and released him.[1]

In watching the spirit of patient submission in which she bore her sufferings, he was deeply impressed by the comfort she seemed to derive from her religious convictions, which enabled her to regard the approach of death with hope and resignation. "I do not believe," he wrote later, "that there was ever a simpler piety than hers, or one that could give a clearer notion of the intercourse that exists between a gentle, virtuous soul and Almighty God."

No longer able, during these last weeks of her life, to occupy her mind by reading, or even by conversing with the members of her family, Madame Necker conceived a great desire for music, the sound of which she felt would soothe and refresh her. Every evening, therefore, her husband arranged that musicians should come and play for an hour in the anteroom outside her bedchamber. One day, when they had not come at the appointed

[1] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'

time, she made a sign to her daughter to play some airs on the piano to fill up the time until they arrived. With this request Madame de Staël hastened at once to comply. Followed by her father, she went into the adjoining room and began to play some of her mother's favourite tunes, feeling, as she did so, "that there was something inexpressibly sombre between the different expression of the airs and the uniform sentiment of sadness with which the approach of death filled every heart."[1] Afterwards she sang an air from Sacchini's opera, "Œdipus Colonna." In this, however, the words "Tenderness and care she has lavished on me, her sympathy has lent charms even to my misfortunes," so clearly expressed her father's thoughts at the moment that he soon became overcome with emotion, and she was forced to desist.[2]

A little while afterwards it became evident to them both that Madame Necker's end was drawing near. Incapable now of making herself understood, she could do nothing but lie and gaze, first at the sky and then at those around her. From time to time she held out to her husband her left hand, upon one of the fingers of which was a ring that he had given her many years before, and upon which he had had engraved a few words of endearment.[3] At last, with the opening days of May, she gradually began to sink, and upon the 5th of that

[1] Madame de Staël, 'Mémoires de la vie privée de mon père.'
[2] Ibid.
[3] Vicomte d'Haussonville, 'La Salon de Madame Necker.'

month passed quietly away in the presence of her family. Standing at that moment in sorrowful contemplation beside her body, lying peacefully before him as if wrapped in sleep, Necker might well have repeated the words of one to whom, in past years, his wife had shown constant kindness. They were these: "If she is not received into Paradise we are all lost."[1]

. . . . . .

In the park at Coppet, at a spot now thickly surrounded with trees, but then easily visible from the windows of his "cabinet de travail," Necker erected a monument to her memory, and there, in accordance with the directions she had given him, his beloved wife was laid to rest.

At his death in 1804, in fulfilment of her desire that they should lie together, his remains were placed beside her own, and many years later those of Madame de Staël found also here a resting-place.

[1] Mélanges de Madame Necker.

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